MARTY LENDS A HAND

by

HAROLD S. LATHAM

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MARTY LENDS A HAND

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MARTY

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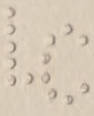
BY

HAROLD S. LATHAM

Author of "Under Orders," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

E. C. CASWELL



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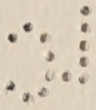

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TO MY BROTHER

WILLIAM

AND

FOUR BOYS

L. N. F.

C. S. K.

P. J. M.

K. W. P.

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MARTY LENDS A HAND

CHAPTER I

MARTY ASSUMES A NEW RÔLE

THERE was an air of hushed expectancy in the room as Mr. Tripper, the head of the English department, mounted the platform and faced the eighty-seven pupils of the sophomore class of Westvale High, their friends and relatives. He leaned genially over the table toward the eager, upturned faces, consulted a slip of paper which he held in his hand, looked about the auditorium again, smiled, and looked back at his memorandum.

The annual oratorical contest of the sophomores was just over. Mr. Tripper was the chairman of the board of judges and he was about to announce the names of the prize winners.

The " Oratoricals " as they were popularly called, were of considerable importance, marking as they did the first step to the sophomore class play. Only those who entered the contest could expect to have parts in the play, and it was almost tradition that to those who carried off the honors should go the leading rôles.

The contest this year had been an unusually spirited one. There had been numerous preliminaries and semifinals. The poor speakers had been gradually eliminated; the dozen competitors of the evening had all shown marked ability and the results of long training and study.

With tantalizing prolixity, Mr. Tripper began:

"I am glad to welcome here this evening the friends of the sophomore class of Westvale High and the class itself. If you have enjoyed, as I have, the work of the young men and the young women who have stood upon this platform, you must feel that your time has been well spent. And this reminds me of a story —"

Mr. Tripper glanced up in feigned surprise at the ripple of laughter which had run through his audience. His manner plainly said, "Why, what's the matter?" Then he assumed an expression of sudden understanding.

"Oh! You aren't interested in stories? You would like to know the names that I have on this paper. Is that it?"

Again, good-natured laughter.

"Well, let me see — I think I will tell you without any stories or further details —" A patter of applause interrupted him. "Ah! That is what you would like. Very well." He adjusted his glasses deliberately.

"I have the honor to make the following unani-

mous report of the committee. The first prize, among the young ladies, goes to Miss Wilda Bennett for her excellent rendition of ' On the Rio Grande '; the second to Miss Alice Fielding for ' Little Orphant Annie.' Among the boys, the first prize winner is Martin Kelly for ' Pompeii,' the second, Henry Elliott for his selection from ' The Rivals.' "

Noisy applause which reached a climax in a rousing cheer for the successful contestants followed the announcement and brought the evening's exercises to a close.

Martin Kelly was standing near the back of the room and smiling a broad, happy smile, genuinely pleased at his success and caring not at all who knew it.

Larry Reed was one of the first to reach Martin's side.

" Congratulations, old man. I'm awfully glad! " He thumped him vigorously on the back. " You deserved it. We all had you down for first after we'd heard you, but who'd ever have thought of Martin Kelly as an elocutionist? "

" Well, don't think of him as one now, for goodness' sake. I just went into this because I wanted to be in the play. They have such bully times in the plays, you know. But ask Doc Goddard how much of an elocutionist I am. He drilled that piece into me. It wasn't Martin Kelly speaking, it was old Doc Goddard."

"Well, you're a good pupil, anyway. If I'd been as good, I think maybe I would have got the first prize instead of you, for I had a better selection, but I didn't follow all Goddard's advice. Congratulations, anyhow." Hen Elliott held out his hand as he spoke.

"Oh, if I only had had a bunch of roses to throw at you. You would have looked so sweet making a bow and holding them in your hands — or lilies of the valley would have been better," Bert Simmons chimed in. "Next time we'll come prepared."

"With cabbages and carrots, I suppose," Martin completed the sentence.

"You bet we'll be ready for you when you play that leading rôle in the sophomore play. Oh, you matinée idol!" Bert jabbed him in the ribs.

His face flushed with excitement, his bushy black hair somewhat tousled by the maulings of his friends, his eyes bright and his smile flashing to the right and to the left, Martin did indeed suggest the hero of a play at the climax of action. No one noticed that his clothes were old or that his shoes were patched.

"We never think about such things with Marty," Wilda Bennett had once said to her mother, who had made some remark about Marty's looking poor. "There is something about him that makes you forget what he has on."

"But he *is* poor, isn't he?" Mrs. Bennett had persisted.

" Oh, I suppose so. There are such an awful lot of Kellys, you know. Martin's the oldest; then there's Bobby and Ruth and Helen and Betsey — she's the youngest. I guess Mr. Kelly doesn't earn much money. They live in that little house on Grove Street down under the hill and he works in the factory. But there isn't any more popular boy in our class than Marty and I think he'll be junior president."

But, had you asked Marty, he would have told you that such an idea was preposterous! The only dream that he had was of the sophomore play, with himself the deep-dyed villain or dashing hero of it. He had been a spectator of the sophomore plays for several years and had envied those who had played in them. Elaborately presented in the Westvale Theater, with all the professional trappings from make-up to stage settings, it was indeed something to be anticipated.

That night, in the house under the hill, Martin told his family of the alluring prospect. Mrs. Kelly, tired as usual from the exacting labors of running a houseful of little Kellys, brightened at the story of her son's success.

" The next time, mother," Martin said, " you've got to come and see me yourself. That'll be the play, in about two months, I think. You shall have a front-row seat — and dad too."

" Of course we'll go, dear; we'd have liked to to-

night, but your father had to work overtime and I couldn't leave the children."

"You'll have to leave them when the play comes off, or bring them. We have our meeting to select the cast to-morrow." He rose and impetuously flung his arms upward. "I can hardly wait till the time comes."

The next day at school dragged dismally. Study hours had never seemed so long, recitation hours never so tiresome — but at last three o'clock came.

Those who had taken part in the "Oratoricals" lost no time in assembling in Dr. Goddard's office.

Dr. Goddard looked the young people over with an appraising eye. "Young ladies and gentlemen," he began abruptly, "we are going to attempt an ambitious production this year — Goldsmith's 'She Stoops to Conquer.' You must all understand that this means work, real work, hard work. If there are any who are not ready for that, now's the time to say so."

He paused, but no one spoke. "Very well. I shall assume that I may put you to any test. There is nothing compulsory about the sophomore play, but once you do take a part you have to agree to be regular and conscientious in your work, just as if it were one of your school studies.

"Now, then, for the assignments. I have decided to give the hero part to Bert Simmons. Simmons didn't get into the 'Finals' in the oratorical

contest, to be sure, but I think it was partly the fault of his selection. His work in the preliminaries leads me to believe that he can do the part of Marlowe well. Miss Bennett will try Kate Hardcastle. Martin Kelly will take Tony Lumpkin. It's a comedy rôle of splendid opportunity."

The other parts were then given out and the play was read through once, after which the cast was dismissed.

Martin was delighted with the rôle that had been assigned to him. All the way home he chuckled over its possibilities, and figured out bits of "business" which might be introduced. "If I can't make them laugh with those lines, either I am hopeless or they are," he thought. "'Tis some chance for you, Martin Kelly."

When he reached the top of the hill and his home came into view in the hollow below, he stopped suddenly, startled at the sight that greeted his eyes. In front of his house was an ambulance from which two or three men were removing a stretcher. In a sort of daze he watched them carry it through the crowd that had gathered, up the front steps and into the house. He stood still for a moment, and then, breathing quickly, he ran headlong down the hill.

He stopped to make no inquiries of the frightened neighbors in the dooryard — though from the few whispered sentences that reached his ears he learned that there had been an explosion at the

factory and that his father was among those injured.

In the front room he found his mother, white-faced and looking more fragile than ever. She caught him to her. "Martin, Martin," she sobbed softly, "your father —"

"Is he —? Tell me, mother."

"No," his mother breathed, "he is still living. God grant he may. They're working over him now. But, oh, Martin, he's horribly — horribly hurt." Great sobs shook the little woman.

Martin tried to comfort her. "Perhaps it will not be as bad as you think." He led her to a couch and suggested that she lie down. A neighbor came and offered to stay with her while Martin went to see if there was anything he could do.

The boy hardly recognized this as his home. Strangers were hurrying in and out, kind neighbors and friends who wanted to do everything they could to make it easier for the Kellys in their trouble. One of them bundled the children off to her home. Others answered the numerous calls of the doctor or busied themselves in straightening up the rooms which confusion had swept into wild disorder.

There flashed through Marty's mind a picture of his home-coming as he had thought it would be that night — he had planned to give impersonations of Tony Lumpkin before an amused father and mother.

He quickly put the thought out of his mind and set himself to the task that was before him. He was the man of the house as long as his father was ill. He would prove his right to the title.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD COPPER MINE

"IT'S too awful for words. I simply can't talk about it." Wilda Bennett turned away to hide her emotion.

"They say," Alice Fielding began, "that he'll never be able to do heavy work again and that it'll be weeks and weeks before he can do anything. His whole left side is paralyzed . . . I wonder what the Kellys will do."

Several sophomores had gathered at the back of the classroom and were discussing, in the few minutes that remained before school opened, the factory explosion of the day before. They were all Marty's friends and they were suffering with him in the affliction that had come upon his family.

"Do you think Marty'll come back to school?" Bert Simmons asked.

"Oh, not to-day," Alice replied.

"I didn't mean to-day," Bert protested. "I wouldn't be surprised if he had to leave altogether and go to work."

"Wouldn't that be a pity!" Wilda interjected. "He counts so much on school, so much more than

the rest of us do. And then, the play, what will we do without him in the play?"

Their speculation on this subject was cut short by the five-minute bell, the signal for all pupils to be at their desks.

"It simply can't be. Marty'll have to come back," Wilda concluded, her eyes flashing.

But down in the little house under the hill, it looked very much indeed as though Marty's school days were over. The boy tried not to see this side of it, but, despite the best of efforts, thoughts of what he seemed likely to miss kept recurring to him.

"I am selfish, selfish, *selfish!*" he said to himself. "I'm just going to put school and all the rest of it out of my mind. It's only right that I should." But it was easier said, or thought, than done.

Mr. Kelly's income had been a meager one. Only by the practice of the greatest economy had it been made to cover the essentials of life, and there was nothing now upon which to fall back. To be sure, as the factory's representative explained to Mrs. Kelly, there was an insurance that would be coming to her, but it would be some weeks at best before she could count on it, and then it would be only a trifle.

Mother and son talked the situation over that second day in detail. Mr. Kelly was resting more comfortably. The doctors had assured them that his life would be spared and his family found it pos-

sible to gather its thoughts and consider the practical aspects of the situation.

"Well," Marty said, and the smile on his lips belied the load on his heart, "I think I'll get a job at the plant."

"Not *that*, Marty, not *that!* After this, anything but that."

"A thing like this won't happen again for years and years. It never does, and you know a job there would pay much better than anything else I could get. I could probably earn fifteen a week at the start."

"Anything but that," his mother reiterated, "anything but that."

"It doesn't have to be decided to-day, anyway. I'll have a look around and see what there is." Marty smiled again, kissed his mother, and left the room.

But the mother saw through his feigned lightheartedness. She knew of the utter disappointment that was his, and, when he had gone out, she cried again, not for the human wreck upstairs, but for the youthful ambition that had been blighted.

Late that afternoon Marty was sitting on the front steps vainly trying to think out a plan of action, when Henry Elliott came up the walk to him.

"Hello, Marty! How goes it?" he sang out.

"Father's much easier, thanks."

"Oh, that's great! I'm so glad! Then you'll be coming back to school."

"I don't think so, Hen. Dad'll never be able to work much. I guess it's up to me to see what I can do."

"Gee! I envy you; I'm so sick of school! I wish I had the chance to go into business."

"I'll sell you my chance for just about three cents," Marty began; then, "No I won't either, because, then, what would I do? I've got to like it — that's all!"

"Aw — you'll like it all righto! Why don't you go in for banking or the Stock Exchange? That's what I'm going to be — a broker, a bull or a bear down in Wall Street. Corner all sorts of things and do stunts with money. Great Cæsar! School hasn't anything like that in it."

"No," Marty admitted. "I don't know as it has —"

"What I really came down here for," Hen explained, "was to bring you a message."

"A message?"

"Yes, let's see. Wilda Bennett told me to say it exactly so. She made me repeat it to her. Don't interrupt me after I get started or I'll have to begin it all over."

"Are you kidding me?"

"No! Honest to goodness! This is what I was to say:

"'*The cast of the school play extends its sympathies to Marty*'— no, I was to say, Mr. Martin

—' to Mr. Martin Kelly and regrets that he was prevented from being present at the first rehearsal. There are rumors that Mr. Kelly is not to rejoin his classmates. Should this be the case, the cast would still wish him to keep the part of Tony Lumpkin in " She Stoops to Conquer," said wish being heartily indorsed '— no, Wilda said *en*dorsed —*' by Dr. Goddard.' "*

Hen Elliott drew a long breath. " There, that's out of my system. I've got such a peculiar mind that, now that I've said it and am done with it, it'll probably be running over in my head all night."

" But I don't understand. I am to be in the play even if I am not in school? "

" Yep."

" Why —"

" Now, you needn't begin to offer objections, because it's all worked out. We are to rehearse evenings and Saturday afternoons and there'll be no reason under the sun why you can't romp around as Tony."

" You mean to say that they'll do that for me? Even Dr. Goddard? "

" Even Dr. Goddard."

" I'll do it." Marty rose and threw back his shoulders. " If you've friends like that, what can't you do? "

" If my eyes deceive me not," Hen Elliott inter-

rupted, looking up the street, "here comes Larry Reed."

"I guess your eyes don't deceive you, then," Marty remarked. "He was here last night, and this morning before he went to work, and now again, anxious to help. I told him if he came to-night I'd let him wash the dishes and I guess he's taken me at my word and has come to do that."

"'Lo, Larry!" Hen called out. "Have you come to wash the dishes? Well, they're all done. Just finished 'em."

"Yes, you have," Larry replied as he came up the steps. "Any old time you wash dishes, Hen Elliott —" Then soberly to Marty, "How's the father?"

"Better," Marty replied. "He's conscious now, and recognizes us."

"That's fine. Anything I can do?"

"No, I guess not, unless you want to take a walk with me and possibly Hen. I've been sort of shut up all day and thought I'd like to get out into the air. Let's stroll up the mine road."

It was a mid-April afternoon. Already there was promise of the summer to come. The trees wore a delicate tracery of green; the grass was springing into new life. There was light and love and laughter in the air. The boys talked as they walked of bright things, for Larry, who guided the

conversation, wanted to get Marty away from his own worries and problems for a time.

Fifteen or twenty minutes' walk brought them beyond the outskirts of Westvale into a region known as the "Bluffs"— from the sharp mounds of dirt and rock that rose precipitously out of the swamps that stretched beyond them for miles and miles.

Here was located the old copper mine, the scene of a gigantic swindle. A trace of the mineral found in the hills had been all that a group of unscrupulous promoters had required to beguile a credulous public. Thousands upon thousands of dollars had been sunk in a venture in which there was never at any time any prospect of profit, except for the men in whose brains the nefarious scheme had originated. Elaborate buildings had been erected, expensive equipment installed; but after a few years of trial, the hopelessness of it all was seen and the project had been abandoned.

This was a quarter of a century or more back; but the mine still stood a monument to folly and greed.

"I have often thought," Larry remarked, as the three boys came out upon a prominence a hundred feet or more from the mine buildings, "what a splendid setting for a moving picture show this would be."

It was indeed a place for high adventure.

To their left rose the tower of the mine — a great steeple of yellow brick, piercing the blue for two

hundred feet; at its base several rambling buildings fallen into decay. Directly in front the earth dropped straight down for a hundred feet to the salt marshes — a plateau of waving green things which went on and on until it seemed to meet with the line of big buildings of the metropolis seven miles away and across the river. The craggy mine hill was the first break in the green stretch of meadows; it almost seemed to rise as a challenge to the distant sky line of brick and mortar.

The mine property had long been untenanted, except for a one-legged caretaker known as Pegleg Jake — who was unpopular with the boys of the neighborhood because he could see no reason why they should want to visit the mine. The boys, on the other hand, could see no reason for Jake's being there, inasmuch as there certainly wasn't anything they could carry away with them except possibly pocketsful of greenish rock in which they weren't at all interested.

"This is a favorite view of mine. I think these meadows are beautiful." It was Larry who spoke. "See! There's a train coming across them, a vital connection between two mainlands — for 'tis little more than a sea down there, a beautiful green sea."

"Beautiful," Hen Elliott agreed, "if you don't know what come up out of it. Wow! Mosquitoes, nice, pleasant, agreeable odors, and goodness knows what else."

"Oh, why be so practical? I say it's a fascinating view."

"Have your own way, have your own way! Only I wish a mosquito would light on the back of your neck right this very minute."

"If it did, I'd kill it and still like the view, see?"

Larry's eyes searched the horizon soberly. He was older than either of the others by several years and perhaps of a more thoughtful temperament. Yet despite the difference of age and nature and the fact that he went to "business" and might be supposed to have other interests, Larry was exceedingly popular with the boys of Martin's class. Indeed he was their leader and adviser, their much sought-after confidant and friend.

"I wonder where old Pegleg is. Seems to me we've crossed the forbidden line," Martin observed. "You don't usually get as close to the mine as this before he's out after you. Let's see if we can't get a little closer."

Slowly they made their way over the rough ground right up to the main entrance, a huge doorway in the side of the hill.

"Reminds me of the tunnels we used to build in the sand on the beach," Marty said, regarding the opening in the earth curiously. "Dare you to go in."

"I don't know about it," Larry speculated.

"There have been several cave-ins up here lately. The timbers that keep the dirt and rocks back are pretty rotten."

"This looks sound right here over this entrance," Hen said. "I'm going to have a look."

He stepped through the opening into what had been the beginning of the main tunnel of the mine. Larry and Marty followed.

They had advanced only about a dozen feet when it became so dark that they could go no farther. The tunnel appeared to have opened up into wider spaces — the darkness now seem unconfined, to go on and up and back without containing walls.

"Gee, I'm so *skeered,*" Hen Elliott laughed nervously.

"Me, too, me, too," Martin answered from somewhere out of sight. "Let's get out. I never got this far before and I'm just as well satisfied to go no farther. If we only had a lantern."

They turned and retraced their steps. Larry was the last to emerge into the light.

"What*ever* do you think you've got there?" Marty asked, pointing to a giant toadstool which Larry held in his hand.

"That's what I intend to find out," came Larry's somewhat shaky reply. "I put out my hand, feeling my way around in there, and came into contact with this cold, slimy, creepy thing, and somehow I couldn't let go."

"Is it a mushroom?" Hen Elliott asked. "There's a whole meal in it, if it is."

"Far be it from me to say, but I think the safest thing to do with it is to chuck it over into our green sea," and he flung it from him down into the meadow lands.

Just as they were starting to leave the mine property, Marty stopped them with an exclamation. "Hark! What's that?"

They listened, and in a moment the sound came again — unmistakably the cry of something in distress.

"If it's in that mine it will cry for all of me," Hen spoke with emphasis.

"It isn't in the mine, it's right over there." Marty started quickly in the direction from which the sounds had issued and came suddenly upon a pit four or five feet wide and thirty-five or forty feet deep. Peering down into it, he saw at the bottom a straggly, yellow dog, weakly sitting on his haunches and periodically raising howls of a distinctly minor chord. Larry and Hen came up.

"It's a dog," Marty explained. "The poor little rascal's got down there and he can't get out."

"Humph! What you going to do about it?" Hen grunted. "Might as well leave him. Homely little brute."

"Leave him! I should say not. I'm going down after him, if you fellows'll help me."

"Marty, don't be an idiot!" Hen cried. "You can't get down there. You'll get hurt. We can tell the police on our way home, and they can come and shoot the little beggar. Come on."

"No," decidedly, "I'm going to try it."

It was an old, open mine shaft which time and numerous cave-ins had pretty nearly filled in. The sides were fairly steep, but there were numerous projections by which a careful climber could make his way up or down.

"It's an outrage," Larry snapped, "to have traps like this open. They ought to be closed up. There's another over there much worse than this. I'm glad the dog chose this one. Well, go to it, Marty — we'll stay up here to help you if you need it."

Marty gave an encouraging whistle to the dog below — answered by a pitiful whimper — and started downward, reaching the bottom in safety.

"Why, the poor little creature is almost starved — he's too weak to stand. Just look at him lick my hand," Marty called to his friends. He picked the dog up and began the climb back. This was more difficult than his trip down had been, but he made it, little by little, and soon was above ground again.

"Now you've got him, what are you going to do with him?" Hen Elliott inquired sarcastically.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Suppose I'll

have to take him home for the night anyway. Then we can turn him over to the S. P. C. A."

Without further ado they started for home, Marty carrying the dog, whose great brown eyes, shining with love and appreciation, made up in no small measure for the scrawny appearance of his body.

"That isn't a dog," Hen snorted derisively, "that's just a yellow cur."

They made most of the return journey in silence. When they got back to Westvale's sidewalks and pavements, Larry spoke.

"Do you know, I've been thinking about that toadstool — I wonder why that old mine couldn't be used to raise mushrooms in on a large scale the way they do in the subterranean caves in Paris. I don't know much about mushrooms and the way they grow, but if darkness helps, believe me, you ought to be able to get especially luxuriant crops up there."

"Say," Hen Elliott began after a moment's reflection, "that's a big idea. That's a mushroom cellar all built and ready for occupancy."

"You've got the business instinct," Larry replied, "and if it looks good to you, it ought to be good. We'll turn the idea over to our young friend Marty here, who's looking for a means of livelihood just at present. Marty, get busy and grow mushrooms in the copper mine!"

"I wonder — if one could —" Marty said skeptically. "It seems a little strange —"

"May be strange," Larry answered, "but fortunes have been made in stranger ways. Think it over."

"I'll do that all right." The trio stopped in front of Marty's home. "I don't see why you couldn't —"

"Nor I," Larry agreed. "But then, again, it may be one of my wild fancies. You know I've often wondered why one couldn't mow the salt meadows and get enough fodder for all the cattle in Christendom. So you see, I'm not responsible. Well, ta, ta." And with a cheery nod Larry was off, Hen with him.

Marty turned and went slowly up the walk to his front door. He paused and then went around to the back of the house.

"They've got enough troubles in there without a sick dog," he said half aloud to the shivering creature in his arms. "We'll fix you up in the cellar for to-night."

CHAPTER III

A REHEARSAL AND A SURPRISE

"NOT too fast, Mr. Kelly, not too fast. You know Tony is supposed to be a great lumbering sort of a fellow whose mind is as slow as his feet, and in the present situation you are trying to be funny, so you must take it easily. Remember, the gentlemen are lost and are inquiring their way, and as Tony Lumpkin you are giving them the most explicit directions. Now, then, take the lines again."

Dr. Goddard sat back and watched the effect of his words as Martin began:

> "'Why, gentlemen, if you know neither the road you are going, nor where you are, nor the road you came, the first thing I have to inform you is, that you have lost your way.'"

"Ah! That's much better. Now, then, keep that spirit up throughout the entire scene. Tony is a clown, so be a clown. Let's hear you read that passage where the directions get rather complicated for our poor travelers, beginning on the next page with 'Then, keeping to the right.'"

"Very well, sir." Marty turned over the page:

"'Then, keeping to the right, you are to go sideways till you come upon Crackskull Common; there you must look sharp for the track of the wheel, and go forward till you come to Farmer Murrain's barn. Coming to the farmer's barn you are to turn to the right and then to the left, and then to the right about again, till you find out the old mill—'"

"All right," Dr. Goddard said. "Now we are ready for the opening of that scene. Let's see what sort of a roustabout number you young gentlemen can give. Remember, this is a tavern. Now, then:

"'Hurrea! hurrea! hurrea! bravo!'"

It was the first week of the rehearsals and even Dr. Goddard, who was not given to optimism, had to admit that things were progressing splendidly. The sophomores' production of "She Stoops to Conquer" promised to be a huge success.

Marty had not returned to school following the accident to his father. His plans, he explained to his friends, were still uncertain.

"I haven't connected with a job yet and everything is still up in the air, but I'm afraid I won't get back to good old Westvale High for some little time."

In consequence, then, of his changed situation, the rehearsals of the play were held evenings at the homes of the different members of the cast. This night Wilda Bennett was hostess. The chairs and

other pieces of furniture had been removed from the parlor into the sitting room.

"The parlor," Wilda had naïvely explained, "is the stage; back here, beyond this threshold, is the audience."

Wilda sat now, in company with the other members of the cast who were not rehearsing, near the back of the second room, watching the proceedings. In the tavern scene, which they were going through, only the male members of the cast were required.

"I think this is lots more fun than rehearsing in that dusty old schoolroom, don't you?" Wilda asked of no one in particular.

"I certainly do," Bert Simmons agreed heartily. "Especially when it's at your house."

"Now don't be trying to do that, Bert. You can't handle the blarney at all. If it had been Marty, now, he would have said something really gracious."

"Marty! Marty! Always Marty. My goodness —"

"Hush! Hush! You are making so much noise back there," Dr. Goddard interrupted, "I don't know which is the stage and which is supposed to be the silent auditorium. Quiet, quiet, please!"

For a few minutes a golden silence reigned, and then the unemployed members of the "Actors' Union" were at it again.

"Say, where is Hen Elliott to-night?" came, sotto voce, from Alice Fielding.

"Search me," Bert Simmons replied. "But wait until Dr. Goddard wants to rehearse the Diggory scene. There'll be something doing when he finds he isn't here."

"Oh, I know where he is," Wilda put in. "He's got the funniest idea. He's going to raise mushrooms in the old copper mine and he's gone to see the agent about renting it."

"Some day that boy's ideas will land him in a padded cell or worse. Mushrooms in the copper mine! The idea!" Bert snorted.

The tavern scene came to a riotous conclusion. Dr. Goddard tapped his pencil on the arm of his chair for attention. "Young ladies and gentlemen, you are doing splendidly. If we can only make our friend Marty unbend a little more in his clowning, if we can induce Miss Fielding to be more coquettish"— Dr. Goddard held up his hand in mock expostulation —"I know it's very hard, Alice — if Bert will become just a trifle more ardent in his love-making, in short, if all of you will get at the real significance of your parts, I think I may safely say it will be the best sophomore show I have been associated with."

Praise from Dr. Goddard was praise indeed! And the Hardcastles and the Marlowes and the

others of Goldsmith's polite comedy were greatly encouraged.

There was conversation for a few minutes and then the first scene was called again.

"We'll polish and polish this first act before we go further," Dr. Goddard explained.

They went over the scene carefully, and at its conclusion Dr. Goddard announced that that would be all for the evening.

"Now, I want you all to stay and be my guests for a time," Wilda said, when the rehearsal was over. "There is the piano and there are songs. Make yourselves at home while I see about the crackers and lemonade that mother promised us. She said we couldn't have anything elaborate because it's war time and the Food Administration is urging us to 'save food'— so it'll just be a nibble!"

She hurried away to the kitchen, returning soon with a trayful of glasses.

"Can't I help you?" Bert Simmons sprang to her side.

"No, thank you," she answered. "I like to do it." But when Marty offered his services a moment later she let him have the tray.

"I wonder where Hen Elliott is," Marty inquired, as, having finished his labors as waiter, he sat down on a divan next Wilda.

"Why, don't you know? He's out signing a

contract for the copper mine." Wilda nibbled daintily at a wafer.

"He — he — is?" Marty ejaculated.

"Humph! Crazy as a loon," Bert Simmons grunted between munches. "Something about mushrooms; thinks they'll be of copper if they are grown in a copper mine."

Marty sat his glass down on his plate, a blank look in his eyes.

"Why, what's the matter, Marty? You look as if you'd seen a ghost," Wilda jested. "Look at him, Bert."

"Don't wonder," Bert confided. "Poor old chap, the shock of Hen's folly is too much for him."

Dr. Goddard joined the group.

"I'm not so sure it's folly," he said. "I assume you are talking of Elliott's project to raise mushrooms in the copper mine."

"Yes, we are. You don't think it's a wild idea?" Bert asked with surprise.

Dr. Goddard, in addition to being a teacher of elocution at Westvale High, was something of a naturalist and his word on subjects of this sort was not to be taken lightly.

"No, indeed, I don't, and I told Elliott so when he came to me for advice. I told him that it was an excellent idea, provided he could get the mine at a reasonable figure. Goodness knows they ought to

give it to him; it hasn't been used for anything but a home for rats and bats for these fifteen years."

" You certainly have got to hand it to Hen. That boy will be worth millions one of these days," Bert remarked. " Can you beat it? Mushrooms in that dirty hole. It takes a crazy man to make money."

" With all due respect to Hen Elliott's practical genius," Wilda began, " now that I think about it, it seems to me it was Larry Reed who started this mushroom proposition. And you were in it, too, Marty, I'd forgotten that. I remember now! Larry told me about the walk he took with you and Mr. Elliott up to the copper mine the time you found Spac."

" Spac! Good gracious, what's that — a *reptile?* " Bert interrupted.

" No, no, no — a dog," Wilda answered impatiently, and went right on, " Why, yes, he said he turned the idea over to Marty to work out. Isn't that so? "

Marty rose abruptly. " I think he did say something about it, but I didn't pay much attention." He walked away from the group over to the piano and pretended to be interested in a harmonized rendering of " Sweet Adelaide " then in progress.

As he stood there, a black suspicion in his mind, the doorbell rang imperiously. Wilda ran to the door, opened it, and admitted Hen Elliott.

" Good evening, Wilda, I thought maybe I'd get

here in time for a little bit of the show." Hen spoke with the air of one who is sure of his welcome.

"I am so glad you came," Wilda said. "I am anxious to know what success you had."

"'Sh! Not a word." He leaned toward her confidentially. "I got the old geezer to let me have the mine for one year for twenty-five dollars. Everything's all fixed up. I had to get my father to sign the papers because I'm not of age; he thinks it's probably a fool idea, but he believes in trying things out, too. Don't tell any one about it; it's just an experiment and I don't want to be made ridiculous until I see how it turns out."

"Tell any one," Wilda echoed. "I've already told everybody, even Martin Kelly." She eyed him closely.

"You have?" He started nervously and then laughed it off easily. "Oh, well, I guess my reputation can stand it."

"Hen Elliott, are you stealing a march on Martin Kelly?"

"I don't understand."

"Yes, you do understand," Wilda flashed back at him.

"Oh, well, if that's what you mean, why — he did know about the thing, but I thought he wasn't interested."

The two had been standing in the hall removed from the others. Wilda looked through the por-

tières, saw Martin, and motioned to him. He came quickly, but stopped when he saw Elliott.

"Good evening," he said soberly.

"Hello, Martin!" Hen responded.

"Mr. Elliott has been to see a representative of the copper-mine owners and has secured a lease of the mine for a year and I think he wants to tell you about it," Wilda gave a curt little nod and left the two together.

"Why, what's all this rumpus about?" Hen asked. "You didn't have a copyright on the mushroom proposition, did you? Larry just threw the idea out into the air; it belonged to the person who grabbed it first. I grabbed it, see? Business is business. Besides, you didn't seem crazy about the scheme that night."

"I didn't know you were so struck with it," Marty retorted.

"Well, the more I considered it, the better I liked it and I thought I'd give it a trial, but I am blessed if I can see what the excitement is. Why shouldn't I give it a trial?"

"You gave it a trial after you got Dr. Goddard's advice. Oh, I admit you are quite within your rights, only I didn't think you'd do anything like that. I don't see why we couldn't have pulled it off together." Martin turned away as though the conversation were at an end.

"Well, why can't we now?" Hen laid a detain-

ing hand on his arm. "I'll sell a half interest in the mine for twenty-five dollars."

Martin shook his head. "Can't be done. I couldn't get twenty-five dollars. If I'd gone into the thing, I would have seen the agent and got his permission to try it out to see if it could be made a success. Then if it had worked, I'd have made some arrangement about paying later. Where would I get twenty-five dollars?"

"Well, you do have to have capital, and that's where I come in," Hen answered easily. "You haven't got it. That isn't your fault, but I don't see why you should cut me on that account. Probably the thing'll be a fizzle anyhow and I'll be out my money."

Martin turned on him. "You know it'll come out all right. You took good care to look out for that before you put up your twenty-five bucks. I congratulate you, Hen Elliott, on your shrewd business insight. No, I'll be hanged if I do! If it were mine, I'd be ashamed of it."

In the next room the amateur players of "She Stoops to Conquer" had been raising healthy young voices in "The Long, Long Trail." From this they had gone into "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," "Keep the Home Fires Burning," and other war songs of the day, winding up with "Good Night, Ladies."

"Well, whoever is guiding that piano thinks it's time for us to be going home," Bert observed, "and if my watch is right — she's correct. Thanks for the suggestion, Alice!"

There was a good-natured rush to the hall, where coats and hats had been left in indiscriminate and confusing piles.

"Why, if here isn't our old friend, Hen — and Marty, too," Bert sang out. "Having a little private party all by yourselves! So exclusive! Is it business or pleasure?"

"We — we were just getting ready to go —" Hen said hesitatingly. "I only dropped in for a moment."

"Well, you're in time to *go* with us anyway; come along." Bert caught him by the arm.

"*Good Night, Ladies, Good Night, Ladies,*" the boys and girls sang as they ran down the front steps, "*Good Night, Ladies, We're going to leave you now.*" But Marty did not sing! There was a bitterness in his heart that could not find expression in music.

CHAPTER IV

A FAMILY COUNCIL

"I DON'T like the idea at all, mother, I don't like it at all. Why can't we stay together just a little longer and see what happens?" Marty looked earnestly at his mother.

"We've been waiting for some time now, dear, and nothing has happened."

"Oh, I know," Marty cried, "and it's all my fault. I ought to have got a job right at the start, but you didn't want me to go into the plant, and so I have waited — looking for something else. It's all my fault."

"No, it isn't either, Marty, I don't like to hear you say that. You can't expect to find work with good pay just at the moment you want it. You have done the best you could; but the fact remains that if we let Betsey go it will help in several ways. It will give me time, perhaps, to do a little sewing for the Grahams and then, of course, it will be one less to feed and clothe."

"I know all that, I know all that," Marty said impatiently, "but yet I don't want to give up Betsey. I'll take that job as errand boy. That would give

us eight dollars more a week and I can be looking around for something else at the same time. Surely with eight dollars more we can keep Betsey."

Mrs. Kelly shook her head. "I can't see why you object so. We're not giving Betsey up, we're just letting her go on a visit to her Cousin Ella's in the country."

"She isn't *her* cousin," Marty interrupted, "she's only *your* cousin; your *second* cousin, too."

"And a dear, good woman," Mrs. Kelly added. "If she wants to take Betsey for a few years, it's the best thing in the world for the child that she should. Knoll Point is a beautiful country town on a lovely river. She'll be happy there, Marty. And Cousin Ella would be kind to her. Why, they are quite the people of Knoll Point. Mr. Gibbins is the postmaster."

"I don't care what he is; I don't like him."

"But you haven't anything against him —"

"No, I suppose I haven't any special thing I can point to. But I can't see what such an old grouch as he is wants with Betsey, anyhow."

"*He* doesn't want her," Mrs. Kelly explained, "it's his wife who wants her. She's lonely — her little girl died, you know. Betsey would be a big comfort to her."

"Oh, Cousin Ella is all right, and if he was half as decent as she is, I wouldn't be minding so much, but still —" Marty flung back his head defiantly —

"I don't like the look of it. It's giving in. People will say, 'The poor Kellys have got to break up the family' and they'll wonder what's the matter with me."

"You mustn't mind what people say," his mother cautioned, "and besides I don't think they'll say any such thing. Our family would be a pretty big proposition for a lad like you." She paused and there was silence in the room for a minute. Then, "You're the man of the house just at present, Marty, and I don't like to have Betsey go when you're so set against it; yet I do think it's the sensible thing."

"Will they let her come back when she wants to or when we want her?"

"Of course. But it might be advisable for her to stay there a few years. We can't tell. We'd have to see how it worked out."

Marty rose and walked over to the window, a troubled look in his eyes.

Just then Betsey herself ran into the room — a little slip of a girl entering her sixth summer. She ran up to her mother and, climbing into her lap, pressed her cheek against Mrs. Kelly's trouble-worn face.

"Am I going to visit Cousin Ella?" she asked, "am I going?"

"Why, Betsey, what gave you that idea?"

"I just heard something about my going to Cousin Ella's. Am I, mumsie, am I?"

"Would you like to, Betsey?" Marty regarded her anxiously as he put the question.

"'Course I'd like to," she replied unhesitatingly. "I like visiting."

"That settles it, then," Marty announced. "If you want to go, you shall."

Betsey jumped down, clapping her hands. "Oh, that'll be nice, that'll be nice. I'm going to visit Cousin Ella, I'm going to visit Cousin Ella!" she repeated in singsong fashion as she ran out of the room.

"You do think it's the best thing, don't you, Marty?"

"I guess so," Marty answered resignedly. "But it's only for a little time until I get started and I'll tell Cousin Ella so, too."

He turned on his heel and hurried upstairs to his own room, shut the door, and threw himself on the bed. For a moment he thought he was going to cry, but only for a moment. Then he sat up straight.

"Of all the sissies," he said aloud, "Martin Kelly, you're the *champeen!* That's a great way to handle a family. Jiminy crickets! I ought to be in an orphan asylum myself."

It was a very sober boy who descended into the sitting room a half hour later, upon the arrival of Mrs. Herman Gibbins.

Mrs. Gibbins was a tall, sweet-faced woman with a subdued, almost apologetic manner. Her voice was low and musical.

"How do you do, Martin?" she said. "Your mother has been telling me that you feel bad about letting Betsey go. That's very noble of you and very natural, but don't think, dear boy, that you're giving her up! She's just coming to visit me for a while, up in the country where there are beautiful hills and flowers and woods and birds. She'll have such a good time. Rosie"— she stopped for a moment and choked back a catch in her throat —"Rosie and I used to have wonderful picnics. It will be the same with Betsey."

"Yes," Marty agreed, "it will be nice for her, and you are good."

"I may come for her, then, to-morrow morning?" Mrs. Gibbins asked of Mrs. Kelly.

Mrs. Kelly nodded her head in assent.

"Oh, Cousin Ella, I'm going to visit you and I'm so glad!" Betsey ran in, her cheeks pink from the outdoor air, her yellow curls pushed back in a wild tangle.

"I'm glad you are happy, Betsey, dear, I'll try to keep you so as long as you stay with me. You and I are going to do lots of things."

"And mumsie, too?" Betsey added, "mumsie, too!"

Mrs. Gibbins paid no attention to the child's re-

mark and went right on: "There are going to be big, red cherries out in our side yard and later on apples and pears and peaches and — oh, lots of things up on the farm!" Mrs. Gibbins bent over and drew the child to her hungrily. "It's going to be so nice to have a little girl around again." She kissed her and turned to Mrs. Kelly.

"Good-by! I'll be here about ten in the morning. Have Betsey and her things all ready, because you know Herman doesn't like to wait." She spoke significantly. "He says he must get back by three and it's a good four hours' trip, with our little Ford." She nodded and departed.

"Mumsie, what does Cousin Ella mean 'have *me* ready'? You're going to visit, too, aren't you?" The child looked anxiously up at her mother.

"Not just now," Mrs. Kelly spoke very tenderly. "You are going first and then I'll come and see you. Won't that be nice?"

"Oh, but mumsie," and the tears welled to the surface, "I don't want to go alone. Please, I don't want to go, I don't want to go without you!"

"It will be so nice to have an automobile ride. You have never had a long automobile ride!"

"I don't want to go alone," Betsey kept saying over and over, her cries becoming louder. "Please, mumsie, you go, too. *Please!*"

"Hush! Or father will hear you. I think he's asleep now."

"Well, *must* I?" the child asked, between her sobs. "Must I go?"

"You will enjoy it, Betsey. You will have a wonderful trip, a wonderful trip." Mrs. Kelly caught her to her bosom.

Marty had been watching the two with rising emotion. His lips parted as though to speak; then they shut again tight and he strode out of the room, down the hall, and out through the back door.

He had barely disappeared from sight when Larry Reed ran up the front steps.

"Good evening," he said when Mrs. Kelly answered his ring. "Is Marty about?"

"Yes, he's around somewhere. Come in. Marty! Marty!" she called, first up the stairs and then down cellar and then out the back door. But there was no answer.

"I can't understand it," she said; "he was here only a minute ago. I'm sorry, but he seems to have disappeared. Can I do anything?"

"No, I guess not." Larry rose. "Why, yes, you can, too. Tell him that it's all fixed up about the copper mine and that the mushrooms are just waiting to be grown there. He'll understand. Good-by."

CHAPTER V

"PEGLEG" IS INTRODUCED

MARTY had heard his mother calling him; he knew that Larry had been there to see him, but he was in no mood to talk to any one. He sat huddled up under a tree a short distance from the house, gloomily watching the antics of Spac, as the dog jumped around in the long grass and occasionally ran to his master and looked inquiringly into his face as if to say, "What's the matter? Why don't you romp with me the way you usually do?"

Marty felt that he had been put to the test and had failed dismally.

"Here I am as strong as any man," he thought, "moping around and wishing things were different, but not doing anything to make them so. Sixteen may not be so very old, but it ought to be old enough to get a decent job."

He sat there, miserable and unhappy, his mind full of a confusion of thoughts, for perhaps half an hour. Then he rose.

"Spac!" he said aloud, with such emphasis that the dog cocked his head on one side doubtfully,

"Spac, we'll give ourselves just one more day. Then, if we can't find anything else for our lily-white hands to do, we'll be an errand boy, at eight per."

He strolled toward the house, Spac following humbly.

"Why, Marty, where have you been? I was looking all over for you. Larry was here," was his mother's greeting.

"I was just down the road a ways. What did Larry want?"

"Nothing much, I guess. He said to tell you something about the copper mine and mushrooms, that it was all right, that you'd know what he meant."

Marty's indifference vanished. "He said it was all right? Are you sure?"

"I think that's what he said; or was it that it was all off? I can't seem to remember which. It was *all* something, I know."

"Oh!" dejectedly, "most likely all off."

"I don't think so, if that would be bad news, because he seemed pleased. But come, now, your supper is ready. In fact, it's almost cold."

"Can't stop for supper," Marty began, but because of his mother's protestations, he sat down at the table and hurried through the meal. Then, without explanation, he seized his hat, ran out of the house, and up the street in the direction of Larry's home.

He found Larry in the yard bending over a rose-bush which was just coming into bud.

"Say," Marty asked breathlessly, "are the mush-rooms copper — I mean is the mine mushrooms — oh, hang it! Is it all right anyhow?"

Larry laughed. "I judge," he replied, "that you are inquiring about the copper mine. Yes, old man, it's all right, I am glad to say."

"All right! How?"

"Well, come and sit down and I'll tell you." He led the way to the front-porch steps.

"That idea of the mushrooms was mine," Larry explained. "I gave it to you, not to Hen Elliott. I went to Hen and told him so, and in tones that he couldn't misunderstand."

"What did he say?" Marty asked eagerly.

"Oh, he didn't say much. Put up some argu-ment about your not being on the job, and that it was business to get ahead of the other fellow if you could and all that sort of rot. But he knew he wasn't in the right and — well, that's about all there is to it. He gave in; he had to!"

"But the twenty-five dollars that he'd paid?"

"I bought him out, paid him just what he'd spent and not a red cent more. So now, Mr. Kelly, you can go right ahead with your plans. The mine is yours. I've got the lease in my pocket. Hen and I went to Mr. Reynolds' office and had it all fixed up. It had to be made out in my name because you

aren't of age; but that won't make any difference. The mine's yours."

"But I can't pay you, Larry."

"You can pay me when the mushrooms begin to grow, that'll be soon enough. That twenty-five dollars wasn't working and I am glad to have it."

"Thank you, Larry," Marty said simply. "I'll pay you back as soon as I can."

"I hope," Marty said, breaking the silence that momentarily settled upon them, "that it won't all come to nothing, that the crops won't fail."

"There is no reason why they should fail. I've been to see Professor Newcombe and he confirms Doc Goddard's opinion that it's a good proposition."

"He does, does he?" Marty jumped to his feet. "Bully! That settles it! Newcombe knows what he's talking about. It seems too good to be true — Gee, I can hardly wait to get started on the thing. Let's go up there to-night — *now,* right this minute."

"To the mine? To-night? It's pretty late —" Larry said doubtfully.

"Oh, we wouldn't have to stay long — I want to see what it looks like."

"All right, I'm game," Larry assented.

Marty whistled to Spac and they started up the road.

"Some dog you've got there. Doesn't look much

like the ' animile ' you brought up out of the depths of the earth," Larry observed as Spac bounded up to them and immediately was off again.

" No, he does look a little more like a regular dog, but his bones still show some."

" What is it you call him? I can't get on to his name."

" I don't wonder. Spac — S-P-A-C. Catch on? "

Larry shook his head. " Can't say that I do."

" Simple enough. I never expected to keep him, but somehow he just naturally attached himself to me and now I couldn't think of parting with him — he's a good friend. But he *almost* got sent to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals — the S. P. C. A.— consequently I named him *almost* in honor of that institution. I couldn't very well call him Spca because you can't pronounce that, so I changed the last two letters about."

Larry laughed. " Clever, but still it's almost a crime to inflict a name like that on a living creature. Spac! "— disdainfully.

" He seems to like it, anyhow. Did you notice how he turned when you spoke his name? "

They were nearing the mine — in the dusk a more awesome place than ever. Below them stretched the meadows, a great impenetrable void fringed with the twinkling lights of the distant city; in back rose the hill into which the mine had been dug, its ragged

outline looming against the sky, a giant tree standing out, bare and forsaken, on its crest.

Spac no longer ran ahead, but walked close by the boys, perhaps remembering his former unfortunate experience and resolving in his little dog mind to play it safe this time.

Without the hesitancy that marked their former visit, Larry and Marty walked up to the door in the hill.

"If Pegleg says anything to us we'll tell him we're the new owners," Marty said, "and that we'll fire him if he doesn't behave. I don't think such an awful lot of him myself."

"We'd better be good to him until we get rid of him," Larry advised. "He's boss around here now. We'll have to get him to show us through. We'll need lights. Let's call him."

"Hey, Jake! Hey, Pegleg! Hello there! Anybody around? Hey, Pegleg!"

Over and over again the boys sent the call through the ramshackle buildings that were scattered around the base of the hill, but no answer came. Finally they shouted into the black cavern yawning in front of them, "Hey, Pegleg! Hey, Jake!" And to their astonishment their summons was answered; they had not thought to find any one in there.

Coming toward them through the tunnel, the lantern that he carried casting grotesque shadows on the rough interior, was a peculiar figure, who, as he

emerged into the outside light, seemed almost to have stepped out of romance.

He was short and lean, swarthy of complexion, with an unpleasant squint in one eye and only one tooth in his mouth and that about in the middle of his upper jaw. A straggly beard, a fiery mat of red hair, through which a comb had not, apparently, been passed for many months, clothes dirty and ragged, and his left leg from the knee down a crude artificial affair beginning in a confusion of leather straps and terminating in a rough stick of wood resembling a broom handle — that was Pegleg.

"Wha' y'u wan'?" he asked gruffly. "Come, wha' y'u wan'?"

"If you please, we should like to see the mine," Marty answered, almost genially.

"Well, y'u can't, tha's all. Now, go!"

"Oh, but we can. We've rented it," Marty persisted.

"Rented it! Humph! Go 'n! No time to fool wi' y'u."

"Look out, Pegleg, or we'll discharge you. I tell you we've rented the mine."

"I'm on to y'u — Y'u can't come in. 'S my job to look out for th' mine. Ge' along!"

"Show him the paper, Larry, show him the paper and then he'll let us in. He'll have to."

"Yeah, show me it," Pegleg sneered. "Show me it."

Larry drew out from his inner coat pocket an official-looking document and held it up to Pegleg.

"Don' make no diff'rence. Fake — likely."

"You know Mr. Reynolds, don't you? — the mine's agent, the man that pays you, if you get paid, for what you do around here?"

"Yeah," Pegleg admitted.

"Well, there is his signature, see?" Larry spelled the name out.

"If y'u're fakin' me I'll — I'll — I'll run y'u out on this," Pegleg flourished his cane.

"But we aren't, Pegleg. This is genuine," Marty insisted.

"Well, s'pose I'll have to le' y'u in. Stay here while I ge' 'nother lantern. Stay righ' here so I won' have to look 'roun' for y'u," he cautioned as he disappeared into the black mouth of the tunnel.

When Pegleg returned a few minutes later he seemed slightly more affable. "Don' know wha' y'u expec' to see. Nothin' here bu' holes. Come along." He gave one of the lanterns to Marty and, carrying the other himself, led the way.

First there was a narrow passage hardly high enough for the boys to walk upright. It was lined with huge, rough timbers which held back the earth and rocks. At the end of this was a big, heavy door. Stepping through this the three found themselves in a compartment, almost like a square room, from which, in different directions, ran smaller tunnels.

"This is the place we got to the other day. Don't you remember?" Marty whispered; "we could feel it grow big in the darkness."

Jake's keen ears had caught the words. "Y'u been here b'fore?" he asked.

"Yes, once. We were looking for you, but we couldn't find you and we went back. We didn't have any lights and couldn't see anything."

"Uh!"— and it seemed to Larry that there was relief in Jake's tone.

"What do you use this room for, Jake?" Larry inquired.

"Nothin' special, nothin' special," Jake answered hastily. "Sleep here or eat here, jus' 's it happens, jus' 's it happens."

"I should think," Marty ventured, "you'd like it better to live in one of the regular buildings."

"Live in 'em, too; if it's cold come in here. Better 'n keepin' lot of fires."

"Like the woodchuck, he goes into the ground in winter," Larry suggested.

"Looks as if sometimes you entertained quite a party in this cave." Marty pointed to eight or ten wooden boxes arranged like chairs around a larger box, the table.

"No, no, no," Jake objected. "Sometimes have a frien' for the night; tha's all, tha's all."

"Can we go into the smaller tunnels?" Marty inquired.

"This is genuine," Marty insisted

"Y'u *can,*" Jake answered, "but I wouldn't advise y'u to. 'Tain't safe. Tha' there 'n," pointing to one, "is cavin' in a ways back. Tha' there 'n's weak," indicating another. "Best let 'em *all* alone for tha' matter. This here's safe 'nough, and there's nothin' to go in them tunnels for anyhow."

"No, I suppose not. I just thought I'd like to see all there was to see," Marty explained. "Besides, I'm not certain which is the best place for my experiment."

"'Speriment! Wha' y'u goin' to do? You plannin' t' work this mine? Ain't nothin' in 't."

"No," Marty said, "I'm not going to mine copper, I'm going to —"

"Some other time," Larry interrupted, "you can tell Jake about it, not now."

Marty walked up to one of the tunnels and took a few steps into it, peering curiously ahead into the darkness which his light pierced for only a few feet.

As he did so, there came to him out of the blackness through which he was trying to see, the unmistakable sound of footsteps, at first faintly near at hand, but the thud, thud, thud! growing fainter and fainter; it seemed to him, too, at one moment that he could almost see several figures moving about as in flight.

"What's doing in there?" Marty asked of Jake.

"Jus' a little fallin' earth — a cave-in."

"Cave-in — nothing!" Marty retorted sharply. "There's somebody in there and you know it; some of your cronies, I suppose. Shall we go and see, Larry?"

Jake sprang to the opening and blocked the way. "Y'u can't go in," he said. "'Tain't safe."

Marty shrugged his shoulders indifferently. "Oh, very well, we won't argue about it. Besides, I guess we've seen enough for one day."

With Jake in the lead they retraced their steps and soon felt the fresh air of the evening on their faces.

"We're much obliged, Jake," Marty began, "for showing us around; but I don't think we'll need you any more. I'll take care of the mine myself from now on."

"Y'u mean y'u won' wan' me a-watchin'?" Jake asked.

"I guess that's about it, Jake. I can't afford a watchman. I'm just going to carry on a little experimenting in the mine and I want it all to myself. *All to myself,* understand? So get your gang out, too! Don't forget them! I'll be able to do my own watching from now on."

Jake said no word, but sullenly regarded the boys as they walked away. When they were out of hearing, he muttered: "Do your own watchin', will y'u? Humph, we'll see, we'll see!"

CHAPTER VI

A BARGAIN IS SEALED

EARLY the next morning Marty went to see Professor Newcombe.

Many years before, the professor had taught in Westvale High, but when his years of service had numbered somewhere around twenty-five he retired from the faculty and purchased a little plot of ground on the outskirts of the town on which he erected a tiny bungalow. Here he brought his books and other choice possessions and proceeded to enjoy life after his own solitary manner.

He spent most of his time in his gardens, which were the wonder and the talk of the community. Many rare flowers blossomed under his tender care; many a plant wholly unknown in that locality thrived. Then, too, there was always a wild luxuriance of the more common varieties — a perfect riot of color was the acre and a half of his land during the summer months.

The professor apparently had no near relatives; he had never married and he had no brothers or sisters. But he had friends galore! In fact he was quite an institution in Westvale. People consulted

him about all manner of growing things and he was always eager to advise and generous with his help.

Marty found the professor, that morning, working over one of his hotbeds. He glanced up and smiled as Marty approached.

"My name is Kelly, Martin Kelly," the boy began.

The professor nodded pleasantly and rose from his task. "Yes, I know. Dr. Goddard told me he had advised you to see me. That is very good. It's mushrooms you're interested in, isn't it?"

"Yes," eagerly, "I've got to make money. My father, you know, has been hurt and can't work. It's up to me."

"Let's go over to the bench, lad, and we'll talk about it." Professor Newcombe led the way to a rustic seat under a near-by tree.

"Mushrooms are good things to grow," he said slowly as he sat down, "but one doesn't get rich overnight growing them and it means a lot of hard work."

"I'm not afraid of work," Marty said.

"No, I don't believe you are," after a moment, "but I don't want you to have any illusions. I don't want you to think that you will be sure of a profit in a week or two weeks, or two months."

Marty's face fell. "Oh, but won't I, if all goes well, in two months?"

"Perhaps, perhaps, but you mustn't count on it."

"I want to do it anyhow and I want to make good and I will — if — you will help me with your advice."

"That's the spirit, and of course I'll help. Be glad to. I've always been interested in mushrooms. As a boy I used to gather them in the pastures on the farm. Ah, those days! When have I seen mushrooms like those wild ones?" The professor paused, and there was a reminiscent look in his eyes. "But you aren't interested in that."

"Oh, but I am," Marty said.

"Well, some time I'll have to tell you some stories about those days. But I know boys and I know you are interested right now, not in reminiscences, but in the old copper mine and what you can do with it."

"Have you grown any mushrooms lately?" Marty asked.

"Yes. In fact, I have two or three beds now that will soon be coming into bearing. But I want you to do the talking. Tell me about the mine. I have never been there."

Briefly Marty described the entering tunnel, the large chamber, and the smaller tunnels diverging from it.

"Fine! Fine! It couldn't be better! The smaller tunnels, you say, end in some cases in shafts which lead up into the air?"

Marty nodded.

"Excellent! Excellent! That will give us ventilation. Ventilation, you know, is very necessary for successful mushroom culture. Temperature too — we'll probably have to make some arrangements for heat in the colder months — a charcoal burner perhaps — and we'll have to watch out and see that it doesn't get too hot in summer."

"Pegleg," Marty put in, "says it isn't ever very cold in the tunnel, he sleeps there when it freezes outside, and I don't believe it's ever hot, way down there in the earth."

"We shall see, we shall see. A fairly even temperature must be maintained all the time, summer and winter. Too much heat is as bad — or worse — than too little. However, we are getting ahead too fast."

"First, I suppose," Marty said, "come the beds and the manure and the compost. I've been reading up on mushrooms and I know what the books say, but you can't always go by books alone."

"You are right. Experience is the best teacher in mushroom growing as in everything else. So much depends upon conditions that can't be set down in black and white."

"Before we go any further, professor, let's talk business. I haven't any money, as I suppose Dr. Goddard told you."

"What is money, when one can grow mushrooms in a mine?" the professor said.

"Oh, I know, but you are busy, and —"

"Busy! Ask some of the people around here! All I do, they say, is to putter about with pots and flowers."

"But — don't they see," Marty asked, "the beauty that you make?"

"Some do, some do. It touches me to have you put it that way, for that's what I like about gardening. A little care can make an old, dull spot blossom with the very radiance of heaven."

There was a moment's silence, and then Marty began again. "As I was saying, I haven't any money and I wouldn't feel that it was right to let you give your time without some return. It seems awfully nervy in me even to suggest it, but would you help me with your advice for a part of the — the mushrooms"— the boy laughed at what seemed to him the absurdity of the question —"the mushrooms that haven't been grown?"

"Why, of course, and that's the only way I would do it, if you had barrels of money. And now I've got a little proposition to make on my own account."

"Yes?" Marty said expectantly.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen, sir."

"Too young to go to war," the professor observed.

"I had thought that if Germany was not licked next year I'd enlist. You can do that if you get

your parents' consent, when you're seventeen. But, of course, dad's accident changes everything. I've got to stay home and take care of the folks now."

"Yes, lad, there is no question where your duty would lie even if you were old enough to join Democracy's army. But I'm getting away from my proposition. I need help on my little flower farm; the man I've had with me for years has enlisted and I'm without any one. How'd you like to work for me in your spare time?"

"Fine, professor. Perhaps in that way I could repay you for helping me with the mushrooms."

"The mushrooms themselves will take care of any little obligation there may be in that direction. This is another and quite separate matter." The professor smiled kindly. "You see I've got a lot of plants started here that have to be cared for, and that take a great deal of time. You could work for me mornings, perhaps, and afternoons take care of your mushrooms and do odd jobs around home. Does that appeal to you? I could pay you ten dollars a week — but I'm a hard taskmaster!"

"Really, do you think I could earn that much? Because I'd be glad to do all I could for nothing — you're so kind about helping me out."

"This is a business proposition of mine. You'll just be doing the work that some one else has always done and been paid for. I always sell a lot of flowers in the summertime and if I don't have some

one to assist me, there won't be any flowers to sell. The mushrooms haven't anything to do with this. We're to be partners in that business and I'll take my share out of the profits. It just happened that you came to me when I was in dire need of a hand or two."

"Oh, I'd love to work for you, professor."

"It's a bargain, then?"

"It is!"

"And when do you start?"

"To-morrow!"

"Fine. And now let's get back to the mushrooms. Come into the house where I have a few old reliable books and a reference table or two. We'll get right down to facts."

For an hour they studied and planned, the old man's enthusiasm rising with each moment.

"It's going to be more exciting than anything I've done in years," he said, when Marty expressed the fear that too much was being put upon him. "You don't need to worry about me. I shall enjoy it!"

And so they apportioned the labor between them, Marty assuming the heavier tasks and the professor those calling for some special knowledge of mushroom growing and including the preparation of the compost, a difficult matter and — as he explained — a vital factor in success.

"Unless the compost is exactly right," Professor

Newcombe said, "no amount of care to the other details will give you a good crop. The compost comes first in importance."

"I didn't suppose you had to be so fussy about a manure," Marty said.

"A compost for mushrooms, lad, is more than ordinary manure, as you will see. It's manure that has been carefully watched and tended and turned over until it has reached just the right stage of heat and moisture. I figure that we'll need several good wagon loads, if we're going to have three beds each of a hundred square feet. But don't you worry your head about that. I'm a gardener and composts are my specialty. What you've got to look out for are the frames and the getting of the spawn. We'll be ready for that in two weeks. I've told you the kind, you know, and the best place to secure it."

"What a lot I've learned this morning. I thought mushrooms came from seeds and that they grew overnight," Marty said as he rose to go.

"Well, you can call the spawn seed if you like," Professor Newcombe replied. "That's in effect what it is, and if mushrooms don't grow overnight, they grow in less time than almost anything else. We ought to have nice, big ones in eight or ten weeks after we plant the spawn. Enough of this, though! We've got to keep some of the mysteries for another time." He reached out his hand. "I will see you at the mine this afternoon. Good-by."

Marty was late that night to the rehearsal of "She Stoops to Conquer."

"Most likely he's turned into a mushroom," Bert Simmons suggested. "That's all he talks about these days."

"Well, you can't blame him, can you?" Wilda Bennett chirped up. "I think it's the most exciting thing — growing mushrooms in that mine. It makes me fairly quiver just to think of it, and if I were doing it, I'd be on tiptoe all the time."

At this point, Dr. Goddard rapped on the table for attention.

"Come to order, ladies and gentlemen." He paused a moment, and then continued, "You'll be pleased to hear that I have the complimentary tickets, seven for each player. Do not go without getting them to-night. One other announcement: You are all to meet at Fischer's next Saturday evening to be measured and fitted for your costumes — Fischer, the costumer, you know, in Newton City. The costumes will then be ready for our final dress rehearsal.

"Now, then," he looked around the little group, "you have only a few more rehearsals before you will be facing that great audience in the theater. Let's make the most of this evening. The first scene is called."

Marty came in in time to answer his cue — and it was the old Marty, the Marty whom the sophomores of Westvale High had missed since the acci-

dent to Mr. Kelly. There was the old-time sparkle in his eye, the ready smile on his lips.

"Hamlet is himself again," Bert Simmons jested, "'or no, is that famous line about Othello? I fear me it is. I judge mushrooms are as much as one dollar and a half a pound and that your crop is flourishing. It's good to see your smiling countenance once more."

Tony Lumpkin, that night, was all that even Dr. Goddard could ask. Marty rollicked through the part, bringing many a laugh from the other players and even a smile to Dr. Goddard's lips.

And all his gayety was not assumed. Marty's pride had been hurt by the fact that, when his folks had needed him, he had seemed to fail them. The departure of his sister with Cousin Ella he had taken as a personal disgrace due wholly to his own shortcomings. Now things were brighter; opportunity had come his way and he had grasped it. There was hard work ahead, he knew, but he loved that and in time there would be rewards which would serve to lighten his mother's burdens and would bring back Betsey. Life was taking on its old rosy hue. He felt that it had been his duty to set things right under his own humble roof and it had grieved him that he had not known how to do it. Now he believed he had found a way.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE EXCITEMENT AT THE MINE

THE next few weeks were busy ones for Marty. A great deal of really hard work had to be done in order to fit the mine for the growing of mushrooms and this Marty insisted upon doing himself under the professor's directions.

"Really, professor, I can't take more from you than all your advice and the benefit of your experience," Marty said one morning when the old man seemed bent on the performance of some task himself. "Even then you are giving too much."

And so Marty had himself cleaned out the spaces which had been selected as suitable for the mushroom beds, gathered the material for their framework and built them, finally filling them in with the compost, prepared under the professor's experienced eye. Every morning Marty worked in the professor's gardens — cultivating, transplanting, weeding, plying the professor, who often labored at his side, with questions and listening intently to the words of the old naturalist as he told of the growing of rare and peculiar plants.

At home Marty's venture was being followed

with the closest of attention. He had communicated to his mother so much of his own enthusiasm for it that, with him, she had begun to believe that at some not far distant date the mushrooms might be looked to as a certain source of income. The finances of the family were slightly less straitened now than they had been for a time — through Marty's earnings and the little sums which Mrs. Kelly was able occasionally to contribute from her sewing. Mr. Kelly's condition, too, was improving, and, though he was still kept to his bed and had not regained the use of his left side, he was making distinct progress each day. So altogether the outlook was brighter and the clouds of despair which had settled upon the little household were gradually being dispersed.

"Things might be a lot worse," Mrs. Kelly observed one day after Marty had described the progress he had made at the mine. "You are certain of success in your work and I am certain with you. Your father is suffering less with each day and becoming more cheerful. I have just enough sewing to keep me busy and Betsey is having a glorious vacation up in the country. I had a letter from Cousin Ella only to-day just full of the wonderful times she and my little girl are having in the woods and fields. She says Betsey is so plump and rosy we wouldn't know her. But Ella dear is not very well. I fear she is unhappy."

"I should think she might well be, with that old man bossing her around," Marty said. "He's enough to make anybody unhappy. I'd sooner have Pegleg than him."

Mrs. Kelly laughed as she shook her head. "You will make Mr. Gibbins out a perfect curmudgeon, won't you, Marty? But tell me, is Pegleg still troubling you?"

"Oh, not so much. I just let him alone, that's all, and I am satisfied when he lets me alone, but somehow I always feel as though his evil eyes were following me."

"I guess you made a mistake in allowing him to stay there at the mine."

"Yes, most likely I did, but what could a fellow do? He came to me with that pitiful story — no place to go, no money — couldn't he live in one of the unused buildings — promised he wouldn't do any harm, and so on and so on. Naturally I had to say 'yes.' If he'd only stay in his old building, I wouldn't care, but he's always popping up somewhere else. I am afraid I'll have to tell him to get out altogether, and yet I'm almost afraid to."

"Does he know what you're doing?" Mrs. Kelly asked.

"I guess he can't have much doubt of it. I'm certain that he goes around each day after I've gone and notes the progress that's been made. There's no way of locking him out."

"I should think you'd tell him," Mrs. Kelly said, "that the next time you see him in your part of the mine, or know of his being there, you'd have to forbid him the property altogether."

"Um — um —" Marty agreed. "I'll make up my mind to tell him that now, and then, when I see him, I'll be as mum as a clam."

This conversation recurred to Marty that very afternoon when, with Spac at his heels, he came face to face with Pegleg as he was entering the tunnel. He stepped back into the daylight and waited for Pegleg to come out. If there was going to be an argument he would rather have it in the open air.

"See here, Pegleg," he said, as the man came stumping along toward him, "what are you doing in there?" Once the words were out Marty felt a rush of courage and continued: "Haven't I told you that you were to stay down at the other end of this property?"

"Wa'n't doin' nothin', wa'n't doin' nothin', wa'n't doin' nothin'," Pegleg muttered. "Jus' lookin' 'roun', jus' lookin' 'roun'."

"Well, do you understand that you are not to look around any more? I want you to keep out! Get me? Keep out!" Marty's tone was defiant.

Pegleg fell to whimpering. "Don' see why y'u're s' hard 'n me," he sniffled. "Everybody's always kickin' Pegleg 'roun'."

"None of that," Marty interrupted, familiar with Pegleg's tactics. "Remember, over there is where you belong," and he pointed to a building several hundred feet away. "See that you stay over there. There is nothing whatsoever that interests you here."

Without further words, Marty took up his lantern and went into the mine. Pegleg hesitated a moment and then started in the direction of his quarters.

When Marty had made certain, from his vantage point within, that Pegleg had really gone, he began his examination of the mushroom beds. The spawn had not been planted, as the compost had not yet reached the right temperature. Professor Newcombe had told him that it would be unwise to do his planting until the thermometer buried in the bed registered about seventy degrees. His instructions were that when this temperature was reached Marty was to summon him and they would together plant the spawn, a most particular operation calling for the exercise of great care. The day before, the beds had been almost at the proper heat.

"What do you suppose we'll find to-day, Spac?" Marty asked of the dog trailing his footsteps. "Most likely we'll have to do our little planting stunt to-night, but we wish, old boy, that it might be postponed a day or so, because to-night, you know, we are going to act!"

As he spoke he dug into the soft earth of one of the beds and drew out the thermometer.

"By Jiminy! It is just about seventy." He looked at it a second to make sure, replaced it, rose from his knees and gave a long whistle. He took out his watch; it was three o'clock. There were four hours before he was due at the theater. It would take two hours to do the planting, an hour or so to get home and get cleaned up. "Guess we've got plenty of time to do it to-night, Spac," he said aloud. "Come along," and a moment later dog and master were speeding up the road in the direction of Professor Newcombe's cottage.

Professor Newcombe saw them coming and guessed the news.

"It's time to plant the spawn, I'll venture," he said, as Marty came up to him. "Anybody would think it had to be planted right on the minute," he added, laughing.

"But you said to let you know when the thermometer reached seventy degrees and that's what it is now. I don't know how long it will stay that way."

"It will probably continue to drop a little each day until it reaches say sixty degrees, which is the desirable growing temperature. The planting can be done with the beds registering anywhere from sixty to seventy, but I prefer seventy. So as there's no reason why we can't or shouldn't, we might as

well put the spawn in to-night. I'll be with you and ready for the work in a minute."

On their way back to the mine Marty explained that the production of "She Stoops to Conquer" by the sophomores was to come that evening, and that he would have to be at the theater by seven o'clock.

"Oh, there will not be any difficulty about that," the professor assured him. "We'll be through by half past five. So you're to make your début to-night, are you? What part do you play?"

"Tony Lumpkin, sir, at your service"— with a touch of Tony's swagger. "Heaps of fun in that part. I'm going to put it over to-night."

Arriving at the mine they eagerly began the task before them. Two pairs of hands made short work of the planting and in little more than an hour it was all done.

"The first step taken—" Marty said proudly. Then after a moment, and looking around at the littered floor, "Well, I guess I've got time to put things in order a bit before I go. I like things put in place; it's bad enough finding 'em in this dark hole, anyway."

"You are a lad after my own heart," the professor said, "but I think I'll have to leave you now, as I want to finish some planting of my own before it gets dark. Remember what I told you about sprinkling the beds and watching the temperature

and ventilation. I am sure we are going to have a wonderful crop." With a cheery nod he started for the exit, Spac following him out.

Marty stood surveying the work of the afternoon with keen pleasure. Here was the beginning of the realization of his dreams. Into these beds he had built high hopes. He was happy in his belief that out of them would spring — not mere mushrooms, as they were only the means to an end, but comforts for his mother, his brothers and sisters and his father, perhaps even luxuries.

With a little smile of satisfaction he stowed away the tools he had been using. Then taking an old basket he started to pick up the litter of paper which gave the tunnel its untidy appearance. When he had gathered it all he stepped back with his basket into the smaller tunnel that shot off at the right of his beds. He would deposit his rubbish in there where it would be both out of the way and out of sight.

Hardly had he turned when there was a dull crash as of the breaking of rotten timbers, followed at once by a wild tumble of loosened earth and rock. In the brief glimpse that Marty had before the light was entirely shut out, it seemed to him as though the whole structure around him were collapsing; the air was filled with falling dirt and splintered wood.

"Cave-in!" he cried. "Oh, my beautiful beds!" Then he wondered about his own safety.

He had left his lantern in the room that was now nothing but a solid pile of earth. The tunnel that he was in apparently had no open shaft, for it was so black he could not even see the sides of it or know in which direction it extended. But he knew that he must move from that immediate section, so a step at a time he made his way forward for what seemed at least a mile, but what was really only a few feet.

" Oh, if it were only possible to do something," he thought over and over again, " if it were only possible to do something." But what could he do there alone in darkness shut off by a perfect mountain of earth?

What a mess things were in! His labor had gone for naught; the money that he had spent likewise; his beds were buried under a mass of débris. And the play — that occurred to him in a flash! The great sophomore production — why it would be ruined; there was no one ready to take his part. He leaned on the damp earth wall and stiffened himself against the flood of tears he felt coming — he would fight, given the chance, but he saw none. And with it all, to miss being Tony Lumpkin.

He did not know that on the other side of the great pile of clay and rock was a little brown dog, barking furiously at the obstruction which separated him from his master.

CHAPTER VIII

TO THE RESCUE!

"HASN'T Tony come yet?" Bert Simmons called across the dressing room to Hen Elliott, who stood in front of a full-length mirror eying himself critically.

"Guess not." Elliott was too intent on his own appearance to give much thought to anything else. "Say, Jiminy crickets, don't I look all fussed up? Anybody would think I was a king instead of a servant." He glanced down at his costume doubtfully.

"Oh, I don't know," Bert answered; "they used to fix their servants up in fearful and wonderful ways in the days of this play. You're just about medium, I should say. Wait until you see me, with my plush coat and knickerbockers."

The Majestic Theater was a place of bustle and excitement on this greatest of all nights for the sophomore players. Boys and girls, waiting for the attention of the make-up man, strolled around the darkened stage peering curiously into every corner. It was a new land to them, this back-stage region, and they found its exploration fascinating.

"Oh, you do look so funny!" Wilda Bennett laughed as she came face to face with Bert Simmons. "I am sure I should never have fallen in love with you in the play if you looked as you do now! The modern hair cut doesn't go with the rest of you. Do get your wig on and be presentable."

"Get it on! Get it on! I'd like to," Bert flung back, "but that old fellow who is applying the grease paint is as slow as a snail. I expect he'll get around to fix me up about the time the curtain rises."

"Be patient, it takes a lot of time to get the girls ready, you know. *We* simply *have* to look nice," Wilda retorted gayly and was off.

"But say," Bert sang out after her, "have you seen Tony? It's almost time to begin and he hasn't shown up."

Wilda turned sharply. "You mean to say that Marty isn't here?"

Bert nodded.

"Does Dr. Goddard know it?"

"Search me. I suppose so."

"You *suppose* so," Wilda snapped; "why haven't you been to see him yourself? What time is it?"

"Half past seven by the clock up there."

"Well, I shall see Dr. Goddard at once!" Wilda ran off the stage and downstairs into the little room where she knew Dr. Goddard was giving a few final instructions to those in the tavern scene whose duties

consisted, mainly, as he put it, of " sitting around and taking things easy."

Wilda dashed in upon the group excitedly. " Dr. Goddard, Marty isn't here and it's twenty-five minutes to eight."

" Marty not here? " The doctor echoed her words. " Why, something must be the matter."

" What can we do? " Wilda cried impatiently.

" I think we'd better send some one to Marty's home," Dr. Goddard answered. " It isn't very far — fifteen minutes' walk. I'll attend to it. Probably he'll come in the meantime — but it won't do any harm to dispatch a messenger anyway. Thank you for coming to me, Miss Bennett."

Somewhat reassured, Wilda went back to the stage.

" Well, I suppose it's all settled now," was Bert's greeting.

" Bert, I think you're horrid! " Wilda stamped her foot. " I'm so worried. Why, if anything happened to Marty, the play would have to be postponed."

" Oh, but he'll come, he'll come. Just give him time. Probably he got so interested watching the mushrooms grow — you know you can see 'em if you watch closely — he just naturally forgot about the time. Forget it yourself and come over and see these sceneshifters. They're fixing the first act. It's a dandy set."

Meanwhile Marty sat alone in the dark tunnel of the mine, vainly trying to figure out some way of escape. Spac no longer barked on the other side of the obstruction, but he had not given up the fight. When his barking and howling, his little staccato yelps varied now and then with long drawn-out wails, brought no result, he sat down on his haunches — perhaps to rest, perhaps to think.

It may have been sheer weariness or it may have been dog reasoning, that took him to his feet a little later, and off, out of the mine and in the direction of Larry's home.

Bert Simmons would have said, had he been consulted, that the dog just naturally went to Larry's because Marty usually stopped there on his way home from the mine, but Marty always knew, quite positively, that Spac went to Larry's with the sole intention of bringing help.

Be that as it may, about seven o'clock Larry heard a familiar scratching at his back door, followed by a barking that could only belong to one little brown mongrel.

"That's Spac! I wonder if Marty's here. He ought to be at the theater by now." Larry went to the door, opened it, and Spac bounded in, barking all the time.

"Hello, old fellow!" Larry stooped down and caught his head between his hands and tried to ruffle him in the way which had always delighted the dog.

But this time Spac drew away and ran to the door and barked again.

"What's the idea? Very well, out you go." Larry opened the door and Spac shot out, but he went only a few feet, then turned and looked questioningly at Larry, barking incessantly.

Larry regarded him doubtfully. "You're as wild as an Indian! Now, go along; I've got to get dressed to go out and haven't time to fool with you." He turned to the door, but Spac ran up on to the porch and began a furious onslaught.

"What's the matter, what's the matter, Spacky? Have you gone mad?"

He bent over him again and stroked him — but the dog would have none of it. For a second time he ran out to the sidewalk and looked back at Larry. Larry started down the steps of the porch to see if there was anything in the street. "Got a cat up the tree?" he asked.

When Spac saw Larry coming toward him, his tail began to wag joyfully and he trotted off briskly down the street. Larry stopped and the dog stopped and looked at him.

"Well, whatever it is you've got, it isn't right here, is it? I believe I'll follow you. You're absolutely the wildest thing I ever saw. Wait until I get my hat." He went in to the house, Spac dejectedly following him to the porch and beginning his campaign all over again.

But when he saw Larry with his hat on, he seemed to understand and struck into a lively pace, barking only occasionally, and looking around now and then to see that Larry was still following him.

It was an adventure to Larry. He hadn't the slightest idea that his action was important one way or the other; that is, he had not until it became evident that the dog was on his way to the mine. Then he quickened his footsteps. The dog, too, increased his speed, and soon boy and beast were running over the uneven ground of the mine property.

A glance through the big door of the mine showed Larry at once what had happened. The first big room was half filled with fallen earth and rock, and the rotten beams which protruded from the débris told the story.

Larry was quick to act. With the dog at his heels, he ran down to the little building where Jake had his quarters. He found the old man dozing in a corner on a pile of straw. He shook him roughly.

"Pegleg! Pegleg!" he cried. "There's been a cave-in at the mine and Marty's up there, I think. You'll have to come and help."

Pegleg blinked stupidly and got to his feet. "Cave-in? Cave-in? In th' mine?"

"Yes! Hurry and get your lantern."

Pegleg rarely hurried, but with Larry's prodding it was not many minutes before they were at the scene of the accident.

" Is there any way of getting into the tunnel that is now blocked off? There is just a chance, you know, that Marty might be on the other side."

" Um," Pegleg grunted, " there's a way."

" Well, show it to me. Quick! We've not a second to lose."

" I dunno why I should be a-helpin' y'u out," Pegleg protested. " Y' ain't never been s' good to me."

" Can't stop to argue about that," Larry insisted; " this is a matter of life and death, maybe. Just get busy and show the way."

Pegleg obeyed, but sullenly. He led Larry up over the hill above the mine, across rough patches of stubble grass and rock, until they came, perhaps two hundred feet away from the mine's opening, to a hole twenty or thirty feet deep.

" Tha's the place," Pegleg said. " Y'u've got to ge' down to the bottom 'n' then crawl on your knees through them bushes int' tha' little hole. After y'u've crawled a ways y'u'll be in the tunnel."

" That's not a very bad place to get down into," Larry said. " I'll go down first."

" Y'u'll go down 'lone. I ain't a-goin'," Pegleg put in.

But Larry did not hear him, for already he was clambering down the shaft, a comparatively easy thing to do because of the gradual slope of the sides and the many vines and roots to cling to. The open-

ing was twenty-five feet across at the top but not more than six feet at the bottom because of the many slides of earth which had filled it in.

Although Larry made good progress, Spac made better. He was down ahead of Larry, sniffing around curiously at the bottom and finding almost at once the little opening Pegleg had described leading through a maze of underbrush into the tunnel. Through this the dog shot like a streak.

A moment later Marty, sitting dejectedly in his black corner of the tunnel, heard a rustle beside him, and then a cold nose was stuck in his face and a joyous bark almost split his ears.

"Spac!" he exclaimed, hugging the dog to him. "You here?"

Spac licked his face as if to make his presence even more sure, and then coming toward them Marty saw a light and Larry.

"Marty, are you all right?" Larry called out anxiously.

"Oh, Larry, I might have known you'd find me." The boy hugged the older lad in a burst of relief.

"Thank God I did! But come to think of it, I didn't. It was Spac!" Larry laughed to hide his real feeling.

"Spac?"

"Yep."

Followed hurried explanations, cut off finally with:

"What time is it?"

" Seven-forty."

" Is that all? Then it isn't too late for the play. Show me how to get out of this hole and I'll establish a new cross-country record. Oh, for a breath of real air! "

They hurried through the tunnel into the shaft and climbed up above ground.

" You'll be going home first, won't you? " Larry asked.

" No, not if you'll stop and straighten things out with mother. I expect she's nearly crazy. I can save a good quarter of an hour if I go direct to the theater."

" Sure, I'll see her."

" Tell her I was delayed in the mine, that's all. No use of worrying her to-night with the accident. And tell her also to hurry to the theater if she doesn't want to miss the first act."

Mrs. Kelly was, as Marty had surmised, alarmed at his absence. His nonappearance at supper time had been strange enough, and as the minutes passed her anxiety had increased, until at seven-thirty she had been nearly beside herself with uneasiness. She had just about decided to go out and telephone to Professor Newcombe when Larry dashed in with his message.

" Just like him," she cried impatiently when Larry had run on, " to insist on finishing a job he'd started no matter what might happen." But her relief that

he was all right — for she had begun to have fears for his safety — was so great that by the time she had reached the theater she was in just the mood to enjoy the play to the full.

The curtain was rung up only half an hour late.

"Very prompt indeed," said the friends of the sophomores in the audience. "One always expects these amateur performances to be so late in beginning."

Such a performance as it was! It was played with the abandon of youth, tempered and governed by a coach who had had many years of experience with school plays.

Marty was an especial delight. "You've got the idea to perfection," Dr. Goddard said to him as he came off after one scene. "Sort of a blending of comedy and pathos. Keep it up, old man."

And Marty kept it up, though he felt that his smiles and his quips were a mockery — to have to act funny when he felt so little like it; oh, it was absurd! But he had determined that his own personal misfortune should not mar the happiness of others, and even his mother in her fifth-row orchestra seat, radiating pride in her boy, would have been amazed to have heard that he did not feel as carefree as he seemed.

"She Stoops to Conquer" that night had one incident in it not in Goldsmith's version. In the half-darkened garden scene, near the end of the play, the

actors, who had been watching the performance from the wings, were amazed to see a little brown dog walk out before the footlights quite unconcernedly and sniff first at one person and then at another until he finally encountered Marty! He sniffed again, and then looked up at the strangely appareled figure before him and then sniffed again. Just at that moment Marty spoke, the lines of Tony Lumpkin to be sure, but what were mere words to Spac! He knew the voice and all doubt vanished. With a joyous wiggle he planted himself right by his master. Though they might try to confine him in the dressing room, there were ways of escaping, especially if the door was not always shut very tight, and the owner of that voice was not going to get out of his sight again that night!

He sniffed again and then looked up at the strangely appareled figure before him . . .

CHAPTER IX

AWAY WITH THE RUINS!

THE curtain had gone down for the last time on the sophomore production of "She Stoops to Conquer" and the players were standing around the stage, their own satisfaction in the performance reflected on their faces.

"Oh, wasn't it too splendid for anything?" Wilda Bennett curtsied much as she had when she brought the play to a close. "Just think, it's all over! No more plays until next year. I do hope the same cast can give the junior play."

"Want to make it a closed corporation, do you?" Bert Simmons chided. "Well, we'll see what can be done about it. We sure did have a jolly time — and so did the audience, I guess. I know I've pretty nearly bowed my head off in these old curtain calls. How many did we have anyhow — seven? I don't think much of curtain calls."

"Oh, I do," Alice Fielding said, "I love 'em."

"That's the girl of it. Always wanting to parade and look pretty."

"Now, not another word," Wilda interrupted. "You were pretty excited when you thought you

weren't going to get in on that last curtain call. Remember how he came running back to the stage all out of breath? Oh, no, you don't like curtain calls, not at all."

They all joined in the laugh at Bert's expense.

"Well, have it your own way," he said. "But before you scatter I've something to say to you."

"Hear, hear! speech, speech!" Hen Elliott cried out, and brought a box which Bert obligingly mounted, his fancy costume and the costumes of his associates adding to the picturesqueness of the scene. He might have been a young squire of the sixteenth century about to entertain his peers with a humorous account of his recent visit to London — but instead he was a very modern boy heartily in earnest. Those who had been expecting some bit of nonsense stopped their own fooling when they saw the seriousness of his face.

"You all know," he began, "that Marty was late to-night, but not many of you know why. I'm going to tell you. Larry Reed came in after the second act and told me."

Briefly and dramatically, Bert described Marty's plans for growing mushrooms. He dwelt on the hard work that had gone into the project and the high hopes that had been entertained for it, and finally described the cave-in which had not only buried the beds underneath a mass of earth and timbers, but had nearly cost Marty his life.

"Had Marty been a few feet from the spot where he was when the crash came," he said, "we can all see what would have happened. But far be it from me to dwell on the gruesome! Instead I say three cheers that he was where he was and three cheers again that he's got so much grit! It took a lot of nerve on Marty's part to go through the show tonight after such an experience and especially when he realized that he would have to begin his mushroom farming all over again.

"Now, then, I'm coming to the point of this oratory. To-morrow is Saturday. None of us have to go to school and I make the suggestion that we who have been *playing* 'She Stoops to Conquer' turn in and help conquer that old copper mine. If we went up there and got busy, all of us, we'd make light work of what would be heavy for Marty alone. Who's with me? Don't know yet what we'll have to do, but Marty's going to grow mushrooms somehow, and it's up to us to show him that we appreciate his sticking by us when he didn't feel like it. Did I hear anybody say he's going?"

"Only *hes*? Can't any *shes* go?" Wilda Bennet laughingly inquired.

"That's the spirit! Let's make it a regular party," Bert rejoined heartily. "We'll get Dr. Goddard and Mrs. Bennett — she'd go, wouldn't she, Wilda? — and all the lads and lassies of the show. What say you?"

A roar of approval greeted the question.

"Bright and early, then! How early, Marty, will you be on hand?" Bert turned to where Marty had been standing, in back of him, but he was no longer there. "Well," he continued to his audience in confiding tones, "let's get up there, say by nine o'clock, and have the whole day at it."

"Bert, you're a brick. I think it's just splendid. I forgive you for all the awful things you've done in the past for thinking of this," Wilda said, as Bert jumped down from his pedestal. "Won't it be great sport? Whoever would have guessed the trouble he'd had to have seen him act to-night! He was wonderful."

"Now don't praise *him* too much," Bert replied good-naturedly, "or I'll just naturally smash the whole scheme to bits. You can say as much as you like about me, but only a little bit, a little teeny weeny bit, about him."

"Well, then, I'll say again that you're horrid, Bert Simmons"— but Wilda laughed as she walked away from him.

When Marty caught the trend of Bert's speech he fled from the scene. He didn't like hearing his own praises sung and, besides, there was an uncomfortable lump in his throat that would have given him trouble if he had had to speak. When Bert told him, after it was all over, what had been done he grasped his hand and stammered, "Thank you.

It's fine of the bunch and I appreciate it. I don't know what there will be to do. I haven't seen the wreck and it may be hopeless."

"Nothing is hopeless," Bert, who seemed to have acquired an amazing optimism, replied. "There must be some dark holes left up there in the mine, and that's all you need to grow mushrooms in, isn't it — dark holes? We'll brace 'em this time so they won't squash in."

It was a gay party that gathered at the copper mine the next morning and awaited Marty's arrival, for the boys and girls who were taking the opportunity of serving their friend as an excuse for a grand lark were on hand a good half hour before the mine lessee himself. He saw them all as he came in sight of the property — Dr. Goddard and Mrs. Bennett and Wilda and Alice Fielding and Bert and the boys of the tavern and yes — even Hen Elliott!

"I didn't expect to see him," Marty thought.

"Hello!" he called out as he came within hailing distance. "Have you been in to look at things?"

"Look at nothing," Bert called back. "We haven't cat's eyes. Hope you've got a few lanterns around here somewhere."

Soon the entire party was inside examining the extent of the accident. One of the beds was wholly uninjured; a second was half covered with fallen rock and earth, the third was completely buried.

"There's where the trouble was, right over that tunnel," Dr. Goddard observed. "The break came just where the little tunnel comes into this bigger cavern and the earth rushed down for a few yards into the small tunnel and a few yards into this chamber. See? One rotten beam did it."

"You don't think any one had a hand in this, do you, Dr. Goddard?" Marty asked. "I mean you think it was a perfectly natural accident, that nobody loosened the timbers or anything like that?"

"It doesn't look so to me. That beam down there is rotten, you can see, and the break is ragged. But why do you ask? You sound like a melodrama. Any one would think you had lots of enemies."

"Oh, no, I just wondered — you imagine strange things sometimes. I am glad you think it was nothing but the work of Father Time."

"Of all spooky places," Alice Fielding said in nervous, high-pitched tones, "I think this is the worst! Let's get to work. What are we girls going to do?"

"You girls can go right outside and start the luncheon."

"Why, it's only ten o'clock!"

"Yes, yes, I know," Bert assented, "but if you start it now it ought to be ready by noon. Find a nice place, fix your table, and do everything by yourselves for once. That's all we brought you along for — to feed us."

"Oh, very well, and I'll see to it that you get only bread and water, just for that! Come on, girls." Wilda led her friends out of the mine and soon had them engaged in preparing a feast that was to be a memorable one.

Marty would not allow any one to touch the "ruins," as he called them, until Professor Newcombe arrived. Fortunately, for the boys were becoming very eager to start, the professor came only a few minutes after the girls had withdrawn.

"This isn't so bad," was the professor's verdict after he had looked around. "I thought from the message I got last night that it was much worse than it is. We can soon straighten this out."

"Is it perfectly safe in here now, do you think? We don't want to be the basis for a newspaper story headed, 'Buried Alive' or anything like that. I'm not a coward, I believe, but oh, you dirt!" Bert shook his finger warningly at the top of the tunnel.

At that they gave the inclosure a careful examination, testing all the beams and crosspieces, and looking for possible sources of future trouble.

"Everything seems to be all right," Dr. Goddard announced when he had completed his tour of investigation. "Now, then, it's up to us to put in a new beam where that old one has given way. Then when we've got that placed, and have put in other reënforcements against further slides, we can remove the dirt and rock from the mushroom beds.

It won't have hurt them at all, will it, professor?"

"I think not seriously," Professor Newcombe assured him. "We'll have to take the spawn up and plant it again, in one bed, but it was only put in yesterday, and it won't do a bit of harm to move it."

And so they fell to, a dozen strong, and a jolly time they had of it, joking and laughing as they worked. When the luncheon call came they were so nearly through with their task that they decided to finish it before they ate.

"I always did hate to get cleaned up," Bert explained, "so many times a day. If we stop now we'll have to scrub and then we'll have to scrub again, later. Let's buckle to. Another hour ought to do it."

They kept at their work without intermission until nearly three o'clock. Then, almost as one man, they stood up and breathed a giant sigh of relief — and a happy sigh. The beds were spread out before them in all their first beauty.

"No one would ever know anything had happened to look in here now," Marty said. "Fellows, I can't thank you, but you know how I feel about it."

"Hungry? Is that the way you feel? Well, that's me!" Bert led a dash to the outer air. Hen Elliott hung back, and put a detaining hand on Marty.

"Marty," he began, "I'm sorry for what I did

— before, you know. I've been sorry ever since. I didn't know as you'd want me to come here this morning, but I thought I'd take a chance. You didn't mind, did you?"

"No, I didn't mind"— coolly.

"It was a rotten deal I gave you before and I know it and I apologize. Can we be friends again?"

"I suppose so —"

Hen hesitated, and then without further words went out of the mine and joined the others. Marty followed him.

The girls had spread the cloth under a tree some little distance from the mine entrance, and on the improvised table was set forth a most appetizing array of food which the hungry "miners" attacked with avidity. Never had sandwiches tasted better, never lemonade so refreshing.

"Do have another sandwich, Marty," Mrs. Bennett urged.

"Thank you, I will; it's my thirteenth."

"You'll have to have still another one, then," Alice Fielding put in. "It would never do to stop with thirteen."

"Only *one* more?" Bert inquired. "I expected to have at least two more, and I think I'm ahead of Marty."

But in time the appetites were satisfied, though Mrs. Bennett began to have misgivings as to

whether they would be or not with the stock of food at her command.

"I have one more sandwich, one piece of cake, and one apple left," she announced. "Who'll eat them?" But not a consumer could be found.

"Well, we'll have to kiss the cook, anyway," Wilda said, pressing her face against her mother's, "because even if we didn't eat everything we pretty nearly did. Now, then, you men clear out while we pick up and pack up!"

The boys were only too glad to obey Wilda's command; there was much to interest them in that immediate locality. They scattered in every direction, in groups of twos and threes and singly. Some clambered down to the meadows in search of possible muskrats, others went back to the mine, or visited the old, open shafts, or simply loafed around under the trees, swapping stories.

Professor Newcombe and Dr. Goddard were thus engaged, happily recalling the old days, when Bert Simmons and three or four very much excited young men rushed up to them. Bert flourished a handbill in front of Dr. Goddard and cried:

"Just look at this. I found it right out there. Read it, read it, read it!" His words tumbled out almost incoherently in his haste.

Dr. Goddard took the paper from the boy's outstretched hand and began to read aloud:

"'Resist the Draft—'"

He stopped abruptly and hurriedly scanned the sheet. Then he sat bolt upright. "Why, this is sedition," he said. "It's pro-German."

Several others came up.

"What is it? What have you found?"

"Young Simmons here," Dr. Goddard explained, "has come upon a circular that could only be the work of an anarchist, a German agent, or a crazy man. When a country is at war it doesn't do to print documents advising people to rise up and overthrow the government. That's practically what this sheet does. We're at war with Germany — here's something that tells us *not* to do what our leaders have decided it is necessary to do to beat Germany. There's a long term in prison — and perhaps worse punishment — waiting for the author of it — if he is ever discovered."

Exclamations of dismay and disgust greeted the crudely printed slip of paper as it was handed from one to another in the group of irate young folks. It was at last returned to Dr. Goddard, who carefully put it away in his inner coat pocket.

"That goes to the town authorities Monday morning," he declared.

But though it was out of sight, it was not out of mind. It remained the only topic of conversation for the rest of the afternoon.

"Who was responsible for it? Who could have brought it to the mine? What would happen when

Dr. Goddard turned it over to the police? "— these questions were still being asked when they started for home.

"And just think," Wilda said, her eyes snapping as she turned and took a last look at the mine as they were leaving —" a spy may have been right around where we were. Why, he may some time have eaten his lunch under the very tree we ate ours under. Isn't it awful, perfectly awful!"

And they all agreed that it was. The mine had taken on a new and sinister aspect.

CHAPTER X

UNDER SUSPICION

THE following Monday morning went down in Westvale's history as "the white morning." While Marty and his friends had been horrified at the import of the circular which chance had thrown in their way, they had little idea that they were on the threshold of one of the biggest and most harrowing surprises that had ever come to the town in which they lived.

The early risers that day in Westvale, on their way to work, rubbed their eyes and looked again. Little groups of them could be seen all along the main streets, standing in front of the signboards which usually displayed harmless enough advertisements, but which now, out of white backgrounds, flashed black and ugly words.

The crowds augmented; no one seemed to be proceeding to any destination. Men, women, and children stood around and talked in loud voices. In one of the more congested districts it almost seemed as if there was danger of a riot. Here a man had mounted the doorstep of a building adjoining a vacant lot in which there were several signboards, and

was denouncing vigorously the perpetrators of the deed.

"They've brought disgrace upon the town; they've made us out a bunch of slackers, the friends of Germany. Can any of you read that poster and not want to lay hold of those responsible for it?"

He pointed dramatically to the billboard by his side and read off the words that glared forth from it, punctuating each with a vigorous sweep of his outstretched hand:

"'*Resist the draft. If others want to fight the Germans let them. Why should you? What have they ever done to you? Conscription is not American. Resist it.*'"

The speaker looked at the people before him.

"Whoever," he went on, "conceived that poster had the brains of a pygmy. Conscription is American. It calls for service from the rich and the poor alike, and as for the question, 'What has Germany done to you?'— Bah! That isn't worth answering. If you see a big ruffian beating a girl, do you pass by or get out after the brute? If you are a *man* you don't stay on the sidewalk.

"Now, then, down with the signs! All together, boys!"

The crowd made a rush, and there was the sound of splintering wood as the signboards crashed to the ground.

Similar scenes were being enacted throughout the town, for every district had been well papered with the large, white sheets with their venomous message.

Down in the city hall there was little less excitement. Officials were running about asking one another what could be done, expressing fear that blood would be shed, urging adequate police protection, even advocating the calling out of the Home Guards.

Into the office of the chief of police about nine o'clock rushed Dr. Goddard. "Have you got the culprits? Do you know who is responsible for this outrage?" he demanded.

"No, no, no," wearily answered the chief for the hundredth time. "We know nothing about it." Then catching sight of his questioner he brightened up.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Goddard? I thought it was another reporter. How news does spread! There have been a dozen here from Newton City and all around. To have such a thing as this happen in our town just as this big draft call comes! — It's too awful!"

"I think I may have a bit of evidence that will help you." Dr. Goddard reached into his pocket and took out the circular which had been found the Saturday before, opened it up, and spread it out on the officer's desk. It was an exact replica, many

times reduced in size, of the posters which had turned Westvale into bedlam.

" That was found Saturday on the grounds of the old copper mine," he said.

" Good Lord, man! Why didn't you bring this to us right away? We might have prevented this catastrophe," the chief cried.

" It was fairly late Saturday afternoon," Dr. Goddard replied, " when we found it, and I thought it would do just as well to report it on Monday. I planned to stop in with it on my way to school. I didn't foresee anything like this, of course. I realize now that I ought not to have lost a moment."

The chief grunted his disgust. " Well, no help for it now. The copper mine, you say? What were you doing there? "

Briefly Dr. Goddard explained about the mushroom experiment and the reason for Saturday's adventure.

" Humph! There is something doing in that mine — don't you think so? "

" It looks that way," Dr. Goddard agreed, " or at least that the mine is visited by those who know of this seditious work."

" Your tip is valuable. I've called in Langley, a private detective of Newton City, to help us out. He's waiting for orders. I'll get him and his squad on the job at once." The chief nodded and abruptly left the high-school professor, who was not at all

satisfied with the part he had played in the affair.

Marty had shared in the town's excitement; in fact, he had himself helped to rip down three billboards and had supplied the match to the bonfire which they had fed. Then, when all was quiet and not a vestige of the offending literature remained, he decided to take a run up to the mine before he reported to Professor Newcombe for work.

He found everything there, apparently, as he had left it, and was about to return to his home when Spac, who had disappeared into one of the smaller tunnels, began barking. Marty whistled to him, but the dog would not come, which was so unusual that Marty decided to investigate. Taking up his lantern he started down the tunnel. He had not, so far as he remembered, ever been in this particular tunnel. Pegleg had warned him against it, had dilated on rotten timbers and predicted an early cave-in. Strangely enough, it seemed to Marty, as he made his way cautiously down it, to be as safe as any of the others. In fact, it looked as though it had been recently reënforced in spots.

"Seems perfectly all right to me," he said aloud, for he had acquired the habit of talking to himself in the loneliness of these dark holes. "Guess I could use this for my business if I had to. It's better than some of the others."

Spac was not yet in sight, but Marty knew from his bark that he could not be far off.

"Got a rat in there, old boy?" he called out to him. He took two or three steps farther along and then stopped from sheer astonishment at the objects which had come within the circle of light thrown by his lantern. Before him on a platform of boards was an old, hand-printing press, surrounded by the inevitable litter of waste paper that is always found where the art of printing is practiced. And at the back there was a pile of newly printed handbills, which, at first sight, he saw were exactly like the one which had been picked up outside two days before. He grabbed up a bunch of them and ran through them quickly. Then he threw them down and turned to the press where he found a form of type still in place, as though the printer, whoever he might have been, had left off work suddenly. As he bent over the machine examining the letters, there sprang out from all sides dozens of men, it seemed, who seized him and held him in grips of iron. He cried out with fright and with pain, but that and Spac's barking were the only sounds, for these men said not a word. With scant courtesy they shoved him along before them, through the tunnel back to his own mushroom beds, and then out into the open air.

"Now, then, my lad, explain yourself." One of the men whirled Marty around and glared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. What were you doing in that mine and monkeying around that seditious matter?"

"Looking at it — trying to see what it was. I never saw it before." Marty's voice sounded unnatural, even in his own ears.

"How'd you come to be in there in the first place?"

"I rent the mine, and —"

"You rent it — and you never saw that printing press before, right on your own property?"

"Never!"

"Humph! Most strange!"

"Oh, come, Langley," one of the other men who had been standing by, silently watching the proceedings, said, "he hasn't anything to do with our little game. We're on the wrong track."

"Think so? Well, you can't always be so sure," Langley replied. "Looks a little phony to me."

"Why, he's nothing but a kid," another put in; "he couldn't have printed those posters."

"Printed them! You don't think I did that?" Marty broke in. "You couldn't think that."

"Maybe you didn't print 'em — but maybe you know something about 'em — helped the printer most likely," Langley surmised.

"Oh, but I didn't! I didn't. I — I hated them as much as you. Please believe that."

"Aw, let him go," came another voice from the group.

"No, I sha'n't do that; I think"— Langley deliberated for a moment —"I think I'll take him down to Chief Thompson and put the responsibility up to him. Can't take the chance of letting anything get by, you know. That's what I'll do. Come along, kid," and Langley took Marty's arm. "You men," he called to those he was leaving behind, "stick around up here and see if you can catch any more suspicious characters. Probably there's a gang of these here German agents, and sooner or later they'll all be coming back to this hole in the ground."

A quarter of an hour later, Langley walked into the office of the chief of police bringing Marty with him.

"Our first catch in the old mine," he announced. "Thought I'd bring him down and let you look him over, and decide what to do with him."

The chief looked up. "This boy?" he said. "You don't mean that he had anything to do with the posters?"

"He says he didn't; but I caught him in the mine fussing around the printing press and looking over some of the literature."

The chief turned to Marty. "Who are you and what have you to say for yourself?"

"My name is Martin Kelly. I have hired the old copper mine to grow mushrooms in."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," the chief nodded understandingly, "Goddard told me."

"Dr. Goddard knows me and so does Professor Newcombe. They'll tell you I'm honest. Send for them."

"I think it'll not be necessary. Go on with your story."

"To-day when I went to look at my mushroom beds, my dog ran away into a part of the mine where I had never been and began to bark. He barked so long that I thought I'd have to go in and see what was the trouble. I followed him and came to an old printing press way back in a sort of corner and surrounded by paper and printed handbills. I picked up some of the circulars and was examining them when this man and a lot of others jumped out at me. That's all I know about it. I was as much surprised as anybody to find that junk in there."

The chief was silent for a moment, then, "How long have you been going to the mine?"

"A month or so."

"Have you ever seen anybody else there, anybody except your friends, that is?"

"No, that is, nobody but Pegleg Jake. He's the one-legged man who used to take care of the mine."

"Who *used* to. Isn't he around there any more?"

"Yes, sir, he's still around. Sleeps in one of the old buildings, I think."

"Um — and you have never seen anybody else there?"

"No, but I think somebody else has been there" — and he told of the night when he and Larry thought they heard footsteps.

"Have you any other information that you could give that would be valuable to us in running down this mystery?"

"I don't think so."

"Your father, does he ever go to the mine?"

"My father was injured in the factory explosion. He hasn't been out of the house for several weeks."

"Oh, yes, I remember the case." The chief reflected for a moment and then reached for a telephone and called a number.

"I want to speak to Dr. Goddard. . . . This is Chief of Police Thompson. . . . Is that you, Goddard? This is Thompson. . . . Yes. . . . Our detectives have brought in young Martin Kelly . . . found him up at the mine. . . . Also found up there a printing press and a stack of literature like that that's been posted up all over town. . . . Detectives thought Kelly might have had a hand in the work. . . . Humph, absurd, that's what I said, too. . . . I'd like to parole him in your custody . . . all right? . . . Might want him for a witness, you know, and would have to make some person like you responsible for him. . . . Thank you, good-by."

"You going to let him go?" Langley asked.

"Certainly. You may go, Kelly. You are paroled in Goddard's custody and must be ready to answer any call from this office. If you get further information, come to me at once."

"Thank you, Mr. Thompson." Marty started out of the office, stopped, and faced the chief. "Will — will my mushroom beds be safe? They're having an awful hard time growing."

"See to it that those beds are not interfered with," and Chief Thompson turned to Langley. "I shall hold you responsible for them."

Langley shook his head despairingly, as Marty left the office.

CHAPTER XI

HEN INVESTIGATES

ABOUT the time that Marty was being ushered into the police station Hen Elliott was having a little excitement all his own up on "Copper Bluffs."

The predominating characteristic of Hen was a shrewdness peculiar for one of his age. He was, as some of his associates frequently put it, "always on the make." In competition he found the zest of life. Had he been of a more robust type he undoubtedly would have gone in for athletics, as the element of contest there would have supplied the excitement he craved. As it was, his hunger was appeased by the play of wits.

Hen's intentions were usually of the best. Sometimes his enthusiasm for gain carried him beyond the bounds of honor, as when he had attempted to take the mine away from Marty. But he always regretted conduct of that sort in his sober moments and resolved to hold himself more firmly in hand.

This instinct of his to study things out for himself came into play with the finding of the seditious circular at the mine property the day of the picnic

there. All the rest of that afternoon he thought about it a good deal, and when on Monday the town was found to have been papered with startling posters of the same character he thought about it still more. The result of his reflections was a visit to the copper mine.

"That circular did not just happen to be on the mine property," he reasoned. "There is a supply of circulars like it there, or somebody with those circulars has been to the mine. And in either case the mine is a mighty interesting place to investigate."

So an hour or two before Marty's arrival Hen had appeared on the scene and had made a tour of exploration rewarded by his discovery of the printing press and the literature. While he was examining his find he heard people approaching in the outer tunnel. He quickly extinguished his light, and, crawling into a dark hole, awaited developments. From their conversation he knew the men to be detectives; he listened intently as they hid themselves away in different parts of the tunnel, ready to spring out and surprise whomever should arrive. He knew when Marty came in, and with high-beating heart he saw the detectives seize him and carry him off. He had been on the point of crying out, but an innate shrewdness held him back. What could be gained by disclosing his presence? And besides he might get himself into serious difficulty.

Left alone, he did not know what to do. There

might be other detectives there, and it seemed the better part of valor to remain perfectly quiet. Five minutes passed — ten — fifteen — a half hour — and he had about decided he could stand it no longer when he heard a cautious footstep coming in his direction. A moment later a pale light was flashed first to the right and then to the left of the tunnel, up and down. The light came nearer, and he was soon able to make out the figure of a man, and then another man, then two more, and finally Pegleg. They moved forward noiselessly, catlike, and passed the hole where Hen was hiding perhaps a dozen feet; then they stopped.

" Ach, dey've gone," came in guttural tones from one of the quintet. " Glose shave! Almost like rats in a drap ve vere caught. If it had not been for dot hole in dot old shaft vhat ve crawled into I don' know vhere ve'd be. How'd you ever come to t'ink of dot, Pegleg? "

" When they ha' th' cave-in, th' kid's frien' got into th' tunnel by crawlin' from th' shaft through tha' hole. I didn' see why we couldn' crawl from th' tunnel into th' shaft."

" Worked out a' right," another in the group said, " but I didn't like it in that shaft. If they'd taken it into their heads to spy around outside and had looked down the shaft, they couldn't have helped seein' us hidin' there at the bottom and a pretty row there'd been."

"Vell, vhat are you talking about? Dey didn't look down dot shaft und dey have gone a'ready und ve are back in here und it's all goot!"

"Well, I'll feel better when I get out of here," another contended.

"Ach, vhat a bunch of cowards, all of you," the first speaker said. "Let's get to business. Vhat are ve going to do? Ve've got five und twenty thousand circulars here. Shall ve spread 'em to-night around?"

"To-night!" several said, their horror at the suggestion reflected in their voices.

"Ya, vhy not? Ve've got 'em excited now. Let's keep at it."

"Nothin' doin'," came from one. "If I get out of this, no more."

"No more for me," piped up a second.

"Ach, da whole bunch of you can go to blazes. I'll give dem out all by myself if I have to. Anybody dot vants to help, can."

"Well, you'd better get 'em out of here as quick as you can. Those cops will be back any minute," one who had agreed to help the leader advised, "and then nobody'll do any distributing. How can we get out, Pegleg?"

"No better way," Pegleg grunted, "'n' through th' little hole again into th' old shaft. When y'u get into tha' y'u can climb out and get away easy. Th' opening o' th' shaft is sort of hid in a lot of

bushes and trees and it's quite a ways from th' mine."

"Vell, let's get to it, then."

They turned and went over to the press, took up the circulars and apportioned them equally and departed from Hen's locality, Pegleg leading the way.

As soon as Hen had decided that they were out of hearing he got up from his cramped position and stretched himself. Then, crawling on his hands and knees and keeping to the side of the tunnel so that he would not lose his direction in the dark, he worked his way back slowly to the larger tunnel and finally to the big door which opened into the daylight. He stepped out into the fresh air, blinked for a moment at the light, and started to run. As he did so, three men rushed at him from different points of the compass, crying to him to halt and brandishing villainous-looking clubs. Hen was only too glad to stop. But before he could say a word one of the men shouted out: "For the Lord's sake, is this a kindergarten of crime? How many more *boys* are in there?"

"There are not any more in there. They are all out in the old shaft. If you'll hurry we can get 'em."

"What's that about the old shaft?" one of the men asked.

"It's a little ways over the hill, but you'll have to

hurry. I heard the whole business; I was hiding in there. They're going to get away." The sentences fairly flew from Hen's lips in his excitement. "Quick! I know the way."

"What'd I tell you about this mine?" one of the men said; "nothing but a honeycomb of passages. I told you 'twasn't any use to hang around inside. Outside was where we wanted to watch. Come on, then, we'll follow the kid. Lead on, boy!"

They started briskly over the hill on the same trip that Larry and Pegleg had made the night of the accident. Just as they came within sight of the great hole in the ground a head rose cautiously from out the rim of earth, looked around, and was quickly withdrawn. But the searchers had seen it. With a shout they rushed forward and, looking down into the great excavation, saw four wretches cowering there below.

"Aha, my fine birds! We have you, have we? Very well, let's see how good you are at climbing," one of the men shouted down. "Now, then, one at a time; up! You first, there. No, you, with the upturned mustache. Come on! Up!"

One by one they came up. "We've got four, anyhow. I wonder if there are any more."

"No, sir," Hen volunteered, "there is only Pegleg left. Of course he couldn't have climbed up, anyhow. There is no use trying to find him. These

old burrows are his home, and he could live in there for a year without getting caught."

"On, then, to the town. We'll have a new kind of parade. You can lead, boy."

It was a queer procession that wound through Westvale's streets that afternoon. The excitement of the morning had passed, and it was well that it had, for the consequences would have been dire for the culprits had the angry mob of the forenoon been on hand to wreak vengeance on those guilty of bringing dishonor to the city's name. When they came to the Municipal Building, Hen stepped aside to give the bluecoats the right of way, but one of them genially pushed him forward. "These here specimens are your present to Westvale," he said. "They ain't much to be proud of, but the town'll be mighty glad to have 'em just the same."

Chief Thompson heard the story of the capture of the plotters through, first from one of the policemen and then from Hen; then he had to have it all over again, supplemented with further details brought out by his own questions.

"You have done a mighty good service to your town, young man, and I'm proud of you," the chief said when his examination had been concluded and the four guilty men led away. "I congratulate you and thank you." He reached for Hen's hand and shook it warmly.

It was on this scene that Marty entered. "Tell

me, is it true?" he cried out without any formality. "Have they got 'em? I just heard they'd got 'em. The men from the mine, I mean!"

"Yes, Kelly, we've got them," Thompson answered.

"And I'm free?" the boy asked.

"You were free before," the officer replied.

"But am I free from suspicion?"

"Of course. Now go along, the two of you, and talk it over," and Thompson shoved Marty and Hen good-naturedly from him.

Hen briefly recounted the experiences of the afternoon.

"And you were there when they jumped on me? My glory! I'll never know what to expect in that mine now. But I don't see yet, Elliott, how you happened to be there. What gave you the idea?"

"Oh, I don't know. I got to figuring about that circular Dr. Goddard found and was doing a little exploring; that's all."

They walked along in silence for a few moments. Then Marty spoke:

"I don't think I was very decent to you Saturday when you wanted to make up. And now you've gone and got me out of an awful hole."

"Oh, forget it," Hen said bluntly. "I didn't do it to get you out of a hole."

"Well, you got me out anyhow. Are you sorry?"

"Sorry? Course not, why should I be? I guess we understand each other."

Marty looked at him doubtfully, and then a smile lit up his eyes. "I guess we do, too, Hen," he said.

"Friends is it, then?"

"Yep, friends," Marty agreed.

CHAPTER XII

SETTLING THE ACCOUNT WITH PEGLEG

"THE mine is too little for both Pegleg and me and that's all there is to it!" Marty bent down and kissed his mother as she sat by the window, sewing, the next day. "Either he goes or I go."

"My, how fierce you are, son — all but the kiss. The words don't fit the deed. But it seems to me you'll have to find Pegleg before you can catch him."

"I'll find him all right. He's in the mine and I'll lie low until he shows up."

"Oh, but I'm afraid to have you go up there all alone if you're going to fight him —"

"I'll not fight him; I couldn't fight a cripple. I'll persuade him — with eloquence — that the best thing for him to do is to come along with me. Maybe I'll frighten him a little, but, never fear, I won't maul him."

"Suppose he should attack you," Mrs. Kelly speculated.

"Well, if he does," Marty rejoined, "I guess I can take care of myself."

Mr. Kelly had been an interested listener to the

conversation. He was gradually taking his place in the family circle again. His left arm was still useless; in fact, his whole left side was far from normal. He was, however, able to walk a little with a cane, dragging his left foot painfully after him. The doctor said that in time he might recover the use of both of these limbs and he advised exercise and outdoor air. His mind was clear and active, and he was confident that ultimately he would be, as he put it, " as chipper as ever."

He leaned forward, now, from the quilt-covered chair in which he was half reclining and spoke:

" What was that, Marty, about the notebook you found? I didn't quite hear that."

" Here it is, dad." The boy stepped over to his father and placed on his knees a little red memorandum book. " See, here are the items in it, apparently an expense account:

" Large type — $ 8.00
" Ink — 2.50
" Jake — 10.00 "

He turned over three or four more pages. " And here again: Jake $10.00, and again, Jake $10.00. Don't you see, dad? Jake was getting money out of them for the use of the mine as a hiding place, when it really wasn't his mine to rent. Just a little private graft. That money really belonged to me."

" Ah, but you wouldn't have taken it, son," Mrs. Kelly said.

"No, of course I wouldn't have taken it from any bunch of German plotters, but it makes me wrathy to think of old Jake putting over anything like that."

"Well, just don't get too wrathy. Remember, lad," Mr. Kelly warned, "we don't want anything to happen to you."

"Never fear, nothing will! I'm not going to work at the professor's until this afternoon; he's got some transplanting he wants done when the sun gets low. So me for the mine this morning. I've got a pet scheme I want to try out."

Arrived at the mine, Marty made the rounds of his beds, in which as yet he noted no developments, and then inspected, very superficially, the neighboring tunnels and caverns in which he saw nothing out of the ordinary. Coming back to the mushroom beds he stood hesitatingly for a moment and then spoke aloud, articulating each word carefully:

"Well, I guess I can go home now. Everything seems O.K."

He extinguished his lantern, walked to the door, opened it, stood clearly outlined against the daylight for a moment, then shut the door with himself on the outside.

The instant the door was shut he started on a quick run over the hill to the old shaft. Making certain there was no one around, he climbed down it to the bottom and, finding the narrow opening, cautiously and as noiselessly as possible worked his

way through it into the tunnel. He reasoned that Pegleg was somewhere in the mine, and that he would remain out of sight as long as he thought that any one else was there, but that when he supposed he had everything to himself he would come out of hiding. Therefore, Marty had tried to give the impression to Pegleg, who, he had felt certain, was watching his movements, that he was going home. Then by quick action he had got back into the mine without having given sign of his return, or so he believed.

With the utmost care Marty felt his way back through the tunnel to the place where the cave-in had been, which, as it was an intersecting point, was a good spot to wait. And he waited, it seemed, hours. Then he heard the clump, clump clump! of the wooden leg as it struck the hard-packed earth of the natural floor of the tunnel. Pegleg carried no lantern. Apparently he thought it the better part of valor to be as inconspicuous as possible.

When Marty figured that he could be only a few feet away he reached into his pocket and pulled out a flashlight, pressed the button, and turned the glare full on Pegleg's face.

The streak of bright light coming at him so unexpectedly from out of the darkness was, momentarily, as effective as a pistol shot. Pegleg did not know what had happened. He let out a shriek, threw up his hands, and fell backward, his cane clat-

tering to the ground. He clawed the air frantically in an effort to regain his equilibrium and finally steadied himself by clutching one of the beams which formed a part of the side support of the tunnel. Then he looked around, cowering, expecting to see at least an army of men.

"Now, Pegleg, we've got a little account to settle," Marty began pleasantly, "and the place of settlement will be down at the town hall."

Pegleg again looked around, hardly daring to believe his eyes. Then, "We? Who's we?" he sputtered.

"Oh, it's just an old score between you and me. You haven't made my life any too pleasant up here and I can't say I'm sorry to have a hand in turning you over to the authorities. Come along, now."

Pegleg bent over and picked up his cane.

"I won' go, tha's all there is to it. I won' go! You can't make me."

"Oh, I think I can, but I don't want to have to *make* you, that way. I'd advise you to come. I'd hate to sail into an old man like you, but I can do it, if necessary, and I would do it, rather than have you slip away again. Why, you don't seem to realize what you've been doing — you've been working against the government, and in war time."

"I workin' 'gains' th' gov'ment? Not I! Didn' have nothin' to do wi' it, nothin' to do wi' it."

"Oh, tell that to the marines — or to Chief

Thompson! You might tell it to Hen Elliott, too, seeing as he was inside attending one of your meetings, and then again you might tell it to me, seeing as how I have got in my pocket a little red book showing that you've been receiving all kinds of money for harboring these scoundrels in *my* mine." Marty broke off roughly. " Come along! Haven't got any time to be talking to you."

In answer Pegleg raised his cane. Marty darted aside, and at the same time slipped his right hand into his side pocket, withdrew it, and pointed it at Pegleg, who saw the flash of a nickel weapon under his nose.

" March or I'll open this thing up on you! " Marty commanded.

Pegleg marched.

When they stepped out into the daylight, Marty replaced his " gun " in his pocket, but Pegleg, knowing its presence, made no further show of resistance.

Marty had suggested to Chief Thompson that the detectives watch the mine's exits from the outside only for a day or two, and leave the inside to him. " I'll land Pegleg, if you do," Marty had assured the chief, " and 'twould be a certain satisfaction to me to do it." Thompson had good-naturedly agreed to the proposal, though he had not expected anything to come of it, and had thoroughly expected to turn the mine over to his men on the morrow. He was

therefore greatly surprised when Marty walked in with his captive.

It was not many minutes before the preliminaries were disposed of and Pegleg was delivered over to the jailer. As he was being escorted out of the room he turned toward the chief and with a malicious laugh cried, " Hey, tell tha' kid to be careful o' his gun."

Before Thompson could interpose a question, Marty dug into his pocket and drew out a little rubber syringe with a nickel tip, such as florists use in spraying freshly cut flowers.

" Many apologies, Jake," he said. " I made a mistake. I didn't have my revolver along, but only this little sprayer of Professor Newcombe's which we use in sprinkling the mushrooms — and it's loaded, too." He squeezed it and a few drops of water fell to the floor.

CHAPTER XIII

MARTY GOES ON A JOURNEY

ONE day, some weeks after Pegleg's capture, Mr. Kelly pushed back his chair from the dinner table and, with more emphasis than was his custom, said:

"And now I'm going up to the mine."

The members of his family looked at him in astonishment.

"You, father?" Mrs. Kelly gasped. "Why, you wouldn't be good for that long walk."

"I'm going up to the mine," Mr. Kelly repeated. "I've been hearing about that place quite as long as I can without seeing it, and the doctor, you know, says I must have exercise."

"Let me borrow the wheel chair from the Grahams and push you up," Marty suggested.

"I don't see where the exercise would come in there, except for you. No, sir-ee, I'm going to walk."

"But," Marty protested, "it must be at least half a mile."

"All of that," Mr. Kelly admitted, "but it doesn't make any difference if it's a mile, I'm going. I can

walk pretty well now. I'll go slow and I may even sit down and rest for a while on the curb, but I'm going to try it out."

"There's no use arguing when father uses that tone of voice, but I'm afraid he'll be terribly tired." There was, however, a smile about Mrs. Kelly's lips. She was beginning to see some of her husband's old spirit coming back and it made her far happier than anything else could.

So they started out, father and son, that afternoon, on the first little journey that Mr. Kelly had taken since the accident that had crippled him. The more Mr. Kelly walked, the easier it seemed, and half the distance had been covered before he ordered a halt under the shade of a big tree.

"Suppose we'll find any mushrooms up this morning, Marty?" he asked as he settled himself comfortably with his back to the tree's trunk.

"We may; you can't tell. It won't be long now, anyway, before they'll be showing themselves."

"Takes quite a while to get 'em started, doesn't it?"

"It does take rather a long time, and yet so much has been happening that the weeks have passed quicker than I thought they would."

"Yes, a lot has happened," Mr. Kelly mused. "You've got your mine; you've been involved in a cave-in; your mushrooms are planted —"

"And you're getting better," Marty supplemented

—" and the German spies and Pegleg are locked up where they won't do any harm for a long, long time — and — I'm learning the horticultural business — and —"

" Oh, yes, at Professor Newcombe's. What's new and interesting there? You haven't told us what you've been doing these last few days."

" It's pretty quiet just now. About all I have to do is to battle with the weeds. That's enough, but it's not as thrilling as it might be. I never knew weeds could grow as fast."

They talked for an hour of many things; of world affairs, the war and the United States' part in it, and of personal interests, the mushrooms, and Marty's future.

" You know, dad, I'm thinking that maybe I can get this mushroom business running so that I can go back to school in the fall."

" I'm hoping that too, son, and I believe you can. I'm going to be able to work a little, you know. Perhaps I can't go back to the factory, but I can run a mushroom farm. And now it seems to me we've sat here long enough. Let's be getting on."

Mr. Kelly had never been to the mine before, although he had lived within a short distance of it for many years. His interest in it now, in view of the developments of the past few weeks, was keen. Marty took him through the main tunnel to the mushroom beds; he pointed out the scene of the

cave-in, and then led him into the smaller tunnel where the German propagandists had operated.

"All very exciting to a man who has been shut away from things so long," was Mr. Kelly's comment. "I believe I'd like to operate this mine. Who knows, boy, how much you and I might make out of it? You have a lease for a year, haven't you? Um-m — better renew it!"

"Better see what sort of crops we get," Marty advised. "You know I'm in debt already for the rent."

It was about four o'clock when, after a long rest period, they started back. They made the return trip easily.

"Nothing the matter with me, is there, son?" Mr. Kelly asked proudly as they neared their home. "Guess I'm coming on. Hello, here's mother."

Mrs. Kelly was coming toward them. Marty knew at sight of her that something was wrong. She was pale and agitated. He attributed this at first to anxiety for his father and called out reassurngly "Dad's fine. He'll be running up there next!" But as he came up closer to her, he saw that she had been crying. "Why, what's the matter, mother?" he asked, hurrying to her side.

"We've had bad news —" Mrs. Kelly replied unevenly, ". . . a telegram from Mr. Gibbins — Cousin Ella is dead."

"Dead!" Marty echoed.

Mrs. Kelly nodded and tears filled her eyes. "He didn't tell us about it until the funeral was over."

"You didn't expect he would, did you?" Marty flung out. "I'm surprised he told you even then. Must have had a sudden tenderness of heart."

"She died last Thursday," Mrs. Kelly concluded.

They made their way silently into the house and sat down in the sitting room and looked at each other blankly, the same thought uppermost in each mind. It was Marty who first voiced it.

"Well, I'm glad of it," he declared.

"Marty! Glad? What do you mean?" Mrs. Kelly looked at him severely.

"Oh, I don't mean I'm glad she's dead, of course. I'm thinking of Betsey. I'm glad that now we can have her back."

"Yes, I'm glad for that, too," Mrs. Kelly agreed softly.

"We've got a little more money coming in now than we had when she went away," Mr. Kelly observed.

"Yes, but even if we didn't have we couldn't let her stay up there with that man," Marty maintained.

"No, no, of course not. I was just thinking that it would be a bit easier, that's all."

"Somebody'll have to go up after her," Mrs. Kelly said, "and I guess it'll be you, Marty. I

can't very well leave the house and the children and your father."

"I'm willing. In fact, I'd like to go. Be sort of a change. I'd have to be gone two days, wouldn't I? Guess I can get Professor Newcombe to let me off that long. I can make up the time by giving him entire days."

"Knoll Point is a nice place to visit in the summer. You'll have a pleasant little trip. I was there once years ago"— there was a far-away look in Mrs. Kelly's eyes —"and it was beautiful!"

"Might be pleasant enough if it weren't for Gibbins. I can't imagine it'd be any fun staying in his house. He'd count the granules of sugar you put on your oatmeal."

"Oh, I don't think he's stingy that way," Mrs. Kelly said.

"Well, he *looks* stingy. Anyhow, I wouldn't want to take a chance on his hospitality too long."

"Poor Cousin Ella, poor Cousin Ella." Mrs. Kelly buried her face in her hands. "I don't think she lived a happy life."

"Well, you ought to be thankful she's out of it, then," Marty suggested. "I'll bet, if you left it to her, she wouldn't come back, so don't let's be weeping about her. Of course, I'm sorry she suffered and all that and awful sorry if she didn't want to die, but somehow I can't help thinking she did."

"Marty," Mrs. Kelly said sternly, "I don't like such talk. No person wants to die."

"All right, mother, we won't argue. Instead, let's plan my trip."

"That's simple enough! There's a train about nine in the morning. You can take that. It'll get you to Knoll Point a little after noon. Then you can stay overnight and come back the next day."

"All those," Marty began pompously, "who are in favor of sending Mr. Martin Kelly up to Knoll Point on this errand of mercy will please signify their intentions. Oh, I'm getting all mixed up; will please signify — will please say 'Aye.'"

He looked around. "Carried unanimously! I go, and I go alone and unarmed into the heart of the enemy's country."

But as it happened, Marty did not go alone. That night, when he ran over to Larry Reed's to tell him of his plans, Larry at once attached himself to the excursion.

"I'm taking my vacation a few days at a time," he explained, "and I'm just looking around for something to do to-morrow and the next day and perhaps the next, for I've three more days coming to me. So don't you want to let me go with you? They say there's good fishing at Knoll Point. I've never been there, but I've heard a lot about it."

"Dee-lighted, I'm sure. Three days, you say?

I wonder if we could stand the old curmudgeon that long."

"Oh, but *I'm* not going to your cousin's house. There's probably a little boarding place up there, and if you don't like it with your cousin you can come and share my bed and board. I believe in making the most of your opportunities. When you're going up into a vacation country, make a vacation of it. You'll stay three days all right, I'll see to that."

"But my mushrooms," Marty interposed.

"What's the matter? Are they sickly? Can't they be left alone that long? Why can't Hen Elliott play nursemaid to them?"

"Hen Elliott!" Marty exclaimed.

"That's what I said. I don't think it would be a mistake to ask him. He learned his lesson before, and I know he'd like to be your friend again."

"He certainly helped me a lot in rounding up the spies," Marty said, still somewhat doubtfully.

"Suppose we go and see him," Larry suggested. "What would he have to do — anything much? That is to say, is there any likelihood he'd have to hire a van to cart the fruit away in, before you get back?"

"He really wouldn't have to do anything except sprinkle the beds once in a while and just watch things. That's about all; the temperature and ventilation, you know. All right, I'll say Hen Elliott, if you do. Let's go."

They found Hen in his back yard vainly endeavoring to shine the spokes in the wheels of his old bicycle, long neglected.

"Is that all you've got to do?" Larry asked, after watching Hen vigorously rub a very rusty spoke.

"It's all I've got to do just now, and it's enough. I've figured it out that if I spent as long on each spoke as I've spent on this one it would take me exactly one year, four hours, and twenty minutes to complete the job."

"There he goes!" Larry gibed, "putting everything on an efficiency basis. Business, business, business! Well, kiddo, we've got something *real* for you to do," and he explained about Marty's proposed trip and put to Hen the request that he oversee the mushroom beds during their owner's absence.

"Course I'll do it, glad to. And can I water 'em with the revolver that you threatened Pegleg with?"

"We've got something better than that now. That took rather too long. You come up to-morrow morning around eight o'clock and I'll show you the process. But be there by eight because my train goes at nine."

"I'll be there!"

"Another thing, Hen. Dad may want to go up to the mine. He's taken it into his head to exercise lately and he seems to be much interested in the mushrooms. You'd help him, wouldn't you, if he

did want to make the trip one of these days that I'm away? Just walk beside him, you know, and sort of steady him, that's all."

A hurt look came over Hen's face which, for a moment, Marty did not understand. "Yes, if he wants to go I'll help him, but he"— hesitatingly —"he doesn't need to go — on my account, you know," he finished lamely.

"What do you mean — on your account?" Marty asked frankly.

"Oh," Hen replied, "nothing, perhaps. I didn't know but you sort of thought that it would be best to have your father around watching things on account of what happened before?"

"Hen," Marty said, "that didn't happen as far as I am concerned. I've knocked it right out of my recollections! You do the same — and forget it. Dad made his first trip to the mine to-day before any of us had thought of going to Knoll Point, so you see you don't figure in his operations at all."

"Oh, if that's the case," Hen smiled more easily, "I'll make him do the fox trot up there every day!"

"I think it'll be a one-step," Marty rejoined.

"Are you ever going to get through chewing the rag?" Larry interrupted with a show of impatience. "I've shined three whole spokes waiting for you two fellows to get through."

"You shined three?" Hen jeered; "which ones?"

"Which ones!" Larry wailed. "Which ones!

He can't tell the ones I shined. Speaks well for my hard work. Here, take your old rag and go back to your job. I hear my supper bell ringing, to speak figuratively. Besides if we're going to get that nine o'clock train to-morrow, old boy "— taking Marty's arm —" we've got some few little odds and ends to attend to. At least, I have. Farewell, Hen, be good to the little mushes."

" And you be good," Hen sang out as the two boys walked away, " to the little fishes and leave a few up there for old Father Knoll."

CHAPTER XIV

AN INTERVIEW WITH GIBBINS

KNOLL POINT was a snug little country town nestling down in the valley of the Clearwater River. It derived its name from a slender strip of land that ran out from the shore and almost cut the river in two. The peninsula, for it was really that in effect, was not more than two or three hundred feet broad, was beautifully wooded, and was the favorite picnic ground for miles around. The town, what there was of it, lay at the base of this beckoning arm. There were half a dozen prosperous farms within sight of the tiny railroad station, a store and post office, and miles and miles of sandy road winding off among green hills.

"Certainly some country," Larry observed as he stood with Marty on the station platform and looked around with interest. "I'd like to spend a month here. Between fishing and climbing those old crags back yonder I think one could have a pretty exciting time."

"It does look sort of nice," Marty agreed. "The river is a peacherino, isn't it? What is it — fresh water or salt?"

"Must be salt; the ocean is only six or seven miles away. Besides, you can tell it's a tidal river — see, there's where the water comes to at high tide; it's pretty nearly low now."

"One of the first things I'm going to do is to walk out on to the Point," Larry said. "It looks as though you'd be almost in the middle of the river. Curious land formation, isn't it?"

"Um," Marty assented; "'tis, but before I investigate it I'm going to see old Cousin Henry and Betsey."

"Righto! Well, go to it. There is your place up there undoubtedly!" Larry pointed up the road to a big, white house on which there appeared a sign: "Knoll Point Post Office," and underneath this: "Herman Gibbins, Dealer in Fine Groceries and House Furnishings." "You go and get your little call over, and to spare you the embarrassment of my presence I'll just stroll down here by the water for a while. When the preliminaries have been dispensed with, you can look me up; I won't be far away. And you might ask your Cousin Herman where one can board around here."

With a wry smile Marty started off up the hill.

"Be of good cheer!" Larry called after him. "Remember, you are a knight going in quest of his lady fair."

"Yes," Marty answered, putting his hand to his

mouth as if to hide what he was saying from some unknown listener, " and like the knights of old I've got to deal with a dragon." With that he ran ahead.

The post office was closed, and so was the store. Marty knocked on the door with his hand until his knuckles hurt. Then he went around to the other side of the house — the post office was apparently at the back — and rang the doorbell. This, too, brought no response, and he returned to the post-office door and repeated his operations, varying them occasionally by rapping on the window. At last he heard sounds within and steps approaching. A bolt was shoved back, the door opened about a foot, and Herman Gibbins' face appeared.

" What do you want? " he snarled. " The post office isn't open until five o'clock."

Even under the most favorable circumstances Herman Gibbins was not the sort of man one would take to naturally. He always appeared hard and disinterested, but this afternoon the unpleasant qualities of his personality seemed to Marty increased twofold.

" How do you do, Mr. Gibbins? " Marty said. " I'm not after mail; I — I just came down to see you and to get Betsey."

Mr. Gibbins started and shot a quick glance at Marty.

" Oh, it's you, is it? I didn't recognize you.

You came after Betsey, did you?" His eyes narrowed until they were mere slits. "Well — well — she isn't here, so you can't have her."

"She isn't here?" Marty asked uncomprehendingly.

"No," Mr. Gibbins replied, "she isn't here. When your Cousin Ella died, I sent her away."

"Sent her away? Where?"

"Oh, you don't need to get so excited; she's all right."

"Where is she?" Marty demanded.

"She's — she's up in — with my brother's people in Norwich."

"Why did you send her up there, Mr. Gibbins? Why didn't you let her come home?" Marty's voice had risen in his excitement until it rang out clear and startling in the country silence.

"Come in. Nothing to be gained by standing outside and hollering at me." Mr. Gibbins stepped back into the store and Marty followed. The place was stuffy and not very light and he would rather have stayed outside. Mr. Gibbins sat down on a box that had at one time contained, according to the glaring labels, "Unexcelled Brand Canned Tomatoes." He motioned Marty to another box near by.

"Now then, boy," he remarked, "tell me, in the first place, why you think you have any right to Betsey."

"Any right to her!" Marty exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Your Cousin Ella adopted her."

"She didn't do any such thing," Marty contradicted flatly. "She just took Betsey for a little while. It was understood that she was to come back when we wanted her."

"Maybe you understood it that way; I didn't."

"But what do you want of her now, anyway, Mr. Gibbins? What's the use of our talking this way?"

"She'd be quite a lot of help to me in another year or so," Mr. Gibbins temporized. "She could wait on customers in the store and hand out the mail, and now that your Cousin Ella has gone, I'll need somebody. Betsey could certainly earn her own board. That's what I have been looking forward to — the time when she could help me out."

"Mr. Gibbins, she isn't ever going to help you out," Marty flung out defiantly. "She is ours and you aren't going to keep her. We'll go to law."

"Ho, ho, my young cockalorum," Mr. Gibbins sneered, "you're going to law, are you? That would cost money. Besides, I've got all the right on my side."

"You haven't a bit of right in Betsey and you know it, and I'm going to take her home with me! I'll go to Norwich and get her! You'll see! I always knew it was a mistake to let her come down here. Why did we do it?"

"Because you couldn't feed her," Mr. Gibbins replied smoothly. "The whole pack of you pretty nearly went to the poorhouse."

"That's a lie! But there's no use talking further to you. I'm going to Norwich. I'll find Betsey, never you fear."

"Now don't go off in such high feather, my lad," Mr. Gibbins said soothingly. "You know there might be one condition on which I'd let you have Betsey back."

"And that?" Marty snapped.

"If you paid for her board and keep for the weeks she's been with me. I figure that would be about a hundred and fifty dollars, including the clothes she's had. Surely if she can't work this bill off herself, it's only just that you should pay it; and right now I need money."

Marty looked at him contemptuously. "You know I haven't got a hundred and fifty dollars, you know I can't pay it."

"No, I don't. I thought maybe, from the way you were going on, you had come into a fortune. Well, those are my terms — pay her board or let her stay and work it out. It's only fair, I say. That's the only reason I ever consented to let Ella take her. I saw she might be of some service to me a little later."

"I don't believe Cousin Ella ever thought of it that way," Marty retorted. "I don't believe it at

all, I won't believe it! And I'm going to get Betsey before you can stop me." He started toward the door. "I won't ask you where she is in Norwich because you wouldn't tell me, but I'll find out!"

Just then there ran in from the outside a little girl, seven or eight years old, with a doll in her hands.

"Betsey!" she called. "Oh, Betsey!" Catching sight of Mr. Gibbins' face she stopped for a moment, and then went on with the innocence of childhood, "Here's Betsey's doll, Mr. Gibbins, I told her this morning I'd bring it back as soon as the glue got dry. Mamma glued on the wig, you know; it was always coming off."

Marty turned sharply on Mr. Gibbins. "Then she isn't away, she's right here. You saw Betsey this morning?" he asked, catching the small girl by the arm.

"Yes. She — she said she'd be waiting for me out in the back yard after dinner, but she wasn't out there and I thought maybe she was in here. I didn't mean nothing," she whimpered, "let me go."

Marty released her and she fled from the room, crying.

Marty stood and looked at Mr. Gibbins, but said nothing. Finally the silence grew too oppressive for the older man. "Well," he said defiantly, "what if she is here?"

"If she is here, I want her," the boy replied.

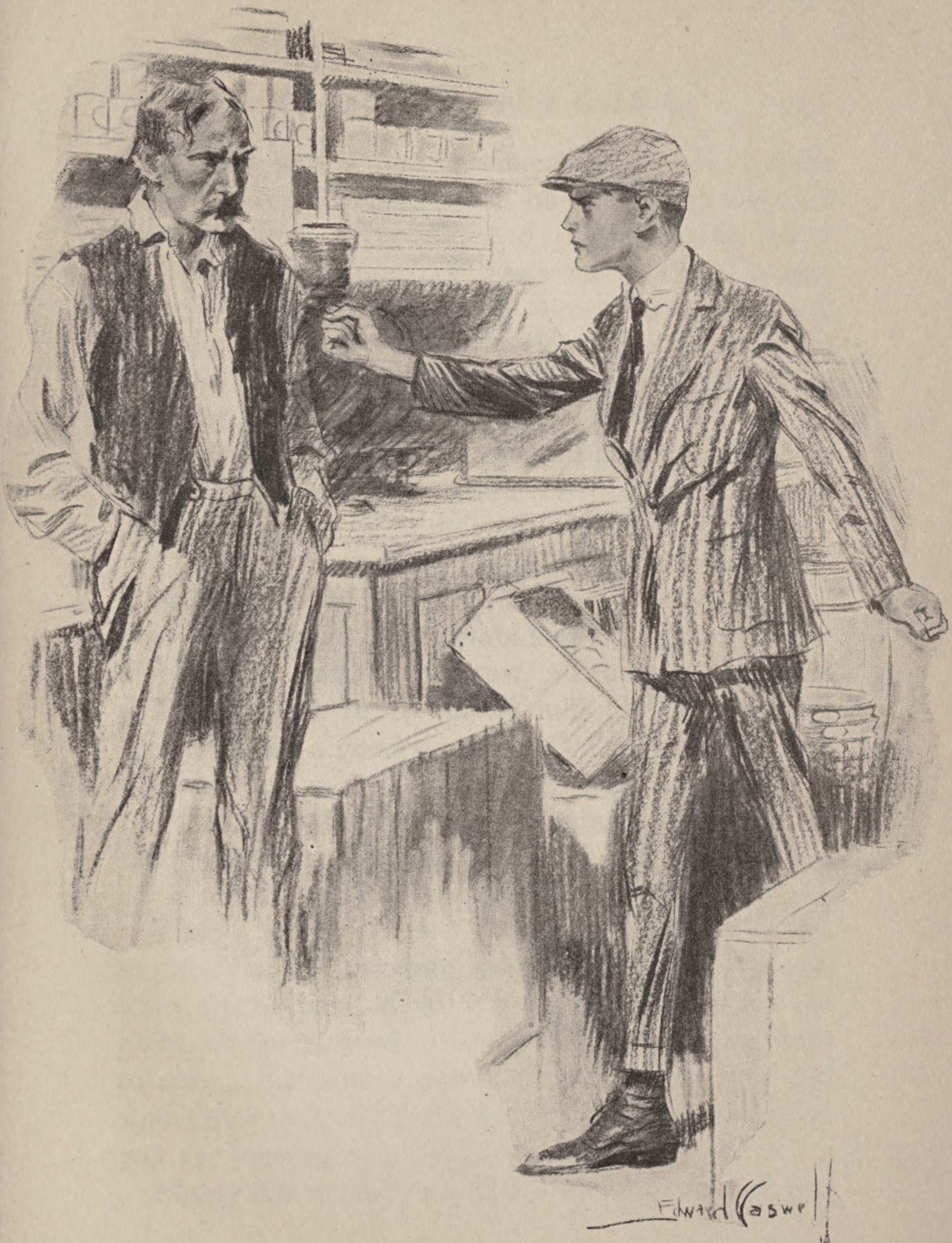
"What's the idea of keeping her away from me? If it's only the money, let me have her and I'll pay you all you ask in good time. I can't give it to you now, but I'll save it up! I'll sign a paper. I'll do anything if you'll only let me have my sister."

Mr. Gibbins deliberated. "I can't decide now. I'll have to think about it. Maybe I — I would take some sort of a promise to pay. You come back here to-morrow. I can't waste any more time on you to-day. I've got some business to attend to." As he spoke his face darkened. "You'll have to stay in town overnight, anyhow, on account of the trains. There isn't another one going down your way 'til morning."

"And can't I see Betsey now, just *see* her?"

"No, you can't. Didn't I tell you I had business to attend to? Sorry I can't offer you hospitality for the night. Mrs. Burns up the road here, she takes lodgers sometimes. She'll take you in, I guess. Go on, now." He rose and shoved the boy outside.

Marty heard him bolt the door after him. He turned and pounded on the panels furiously, demanding admittance in harsh, loud cries. But there was no response. He stood there uncertainly for a few moments longer, wondering what he could do, and then, realizing the futility of any action, started down the path toward the station. He found Larry waiting for him on the platform, and in a few vivid sentences he described the interview.



" If she is here, I want her," the boy replied

"Well, he's a fine specimen of a man, I must say!" Larry observed when he had heard Marty's story. "But, after all, the child is safe, so I wouldn't be so upset. I don't see as there is anything to do except wait until to-morrow and go and see him. He won't murder her in the meantime; it's just a game to get a little money. Cheer up, cheer up!"

"Don't you think that it would be a good idea to hunt up a policeman or whatever it is they have in a place like this? Couldn't he help?"

"No, I think it would only make matters worse. This Gibbins is the postmaster, he must be considered a responsible, law-abiding citizen. I say let things slide until to-morrow. Probably the mess will then clear itself up. You'll feel better after you have had a good supper. Did the old gink give you any idea as to where we might get board?"

"Yes, at Mrs. Burns', third house up." Marty rose wearily, taking up his hand bag and moving off in the direction of the farmhouse.

They found Mrs. Burns a pleasant-faced, motherly sort of woman, who, after a few explanations on the part of the boys, took them in for the night or for a week or for "as long as you want to stay. Sometimes our boarders like it here and sometimes they think it's dead; all depends on what you are looking for," she volunteered.

Marty did indeed feel better after his supper and

especially after he had confided some of his worries to Mrs. Burns and had been assured by her that his sister was safe.

" Mr. Gibbins is as hard as steel," she said, " but I don't think he'd be cruel to a child. He might not love her any, but he wouldn't hurt her. He measures everything by money and it might cost him something if he hurt her."

" Is Mr. Gibbins popular in Knoll Point? " Larry asked.

Mr. Burns, a little, red-cheeked Irishman, to whom, if appearances counted, life was a glorious joke, then took a hand in the conversation.

" I should say not," he declared. " Can anybody be popular who hasn't got a moment to swap a good story or smoke a pipe with you now and then and who's always figuring that if he hadn't stopped to pass the time of day he might have got another row of onions weeded or something like that? Why, here's the sort of man old Gibbins is: he's the only farmer in Knoll Point that's got a Ford. Do you believe he takes any pleasure in it? Not he! He's figured out how much gas is used each time the engine puffs, and if it should ever back-fire I think he'd die of heart failure. But as I was telling you, here's the sort he is: he runs this machine of his when he gets back from a trip up over the little hill into his yard, but the minute he gets it into the driveway he shuts off the engine and gets out and pushes it

for fifty feet or more into the barn! He calculates that that way he saves a gallon of gas in a year. A gallon of gas saved, you know, is two quarts of beans, and two quarts of beans planted is quite a little patch of beans. Beans from that patch planted again — oh, you could go on forever, all from that gallon of gas."

Larry broke in, with a laugh: "I guess you're jollying us, Mr. Burns."

"Well," said Mrs. Burns, "maybe he invented some of the details, but he ain't far off on the general idea."

"Would you mind telling me what you're doing, Mr. Burns?" Larry asked when there was a pause in the conversation. "What is that thing you've got? Looks like a rat trap."

"This?" Mr. Burns held up a wire cage. "Why, this is an eel trap. I'm going eeling tonight. This river is great for eels. Don't you boys want to go along?"

"You bet I do," Larry replied. "That's what I came up here for — to see a little fishing. I've never been eeling. You'll come too, Marty?"

"Oh, I don't know," Marty answered indifferently.

"Sure you will. Now put your troubles out of your mind and come out for a rare adventure. Tomorrow we'll straighten this thing out."

"That's my advice, too," Mrs. Burns said.

"You can't do anything to-night and you might as well go out with father and your friend. It'll be a new experience for you."

After a little persuasion, Marty agreed and soon was engaged with the other two in fixing lines and nets and traps.

"The traps," Mr. Burns explained, "we're just going to set and leave — but if we're lucky we'll catch a dozen or so good fellows with hooks. If we don't get any that way we'll try spearing 'em."

"How soon are we going?"

"As soon as it gets dark. The darker it is the better for eeling, you know."

"That's the funny part of it," Mrs. Burns put in. "It has to be dark, but you carry a lantern and light things up! Sort of foolish, it seems to me."

"Mother, how many times have I explained that to you?" Mr. Burns remarked, with an elaborate show of impatience he did not feel. "When it's light all over eels don't come out of the mud. When it's dark they do. Then if they see a little light they come to investigate it. They're curious critters — like women."

"Um — um!" Mrs. Burns accepted her husband's explanation. "I've heard that before, but I still think it's foolish!"

About nine o'clock all was ready, and with traps and lines and spears and a pair of oars the party set out.

"We go just off the Point," Mr. Burns explained, "in that little cove. We could reach it from the land, but somehow I like it better in a boat. Seems more like fishing."

They got into the little boat and rowed to the rocks where the eels were supposed to frolic, and waited, as Larry put it, for excitement to come their way.

And excitement came — though hardly of the "eel" variety they had anticipated.

CHAPTER XV

OF EELING — AND OTHER THINGS

"DON'T be afraid of using too much clam. Eels have powerful big mouths and are greedy critters. Feed 'em well and they'll swaller the hook so sure they'll never get away." Mr. Burns reached over as he spoke and selected a big clam from the bait can and proceeded to embed the hook in it.

Marty and Larry were, for the moment, too interested in their surroundings to give attention to the important task of baiting up. It was dark — "almost as dark," Marty said, "as back home in the copper mine"— but a velvety, fragrant darkness. The water lapped the sides of the boat gently and made it sway ever so little; there were mysterious splashes down the river, perhaps of fish leaping into the air in wild flight from an enemy; the cries of night birds came strangely from the woods on the far shore.

Larry at length summed up his reaction to the place: "I could just stay here for hours wondering about each sound. You can imagine such a lot,

sitting in a boat in the middle of a river like this, at night."

"Well, all I've got to say," Mr. Burns broke in, "is, that the more you speculate, the fewer eels you'll get."

"That's true! Well, here goes," and Larry dug into the clam can, Marty following his example.

As so often happens, luck was with the beginner. Marty had just thrown his line overboard and was settling himself for another period of quiet reflection when he felt a sharp tug on it. At once he was all excitement.

"I've got one, I've got one," and he began to haul in frantically.

"Never say you've got an eel," Mr. Burns advised, "until you have him in the frying pan. An eel is slippery, boy."

Marty paid no attention to Mr. Burns' words, but worked away at his line and in a moment landed what Mr. Burns at once termed, "a fine, fat feller."

"Is that an eel?" Marty held his line gingerly between two fingers and examined critically the creature that squirmed and twisted at the end of it. "It looks to me like nothing but a snake."

"It's an eel all right," Mr. Burns said, "and a beauty. Now, take it off."

"Take it off!" Marty echoed, "I should say not." Then he quickly caught himself. "That is — how?"

"First of all you must kill him by banging him against the side of the boat and don't be too tender with him, because eels are hard to kill. Then, when he stops his antics, or pretty near stops, dig down into the box under the back seat and take out a handful of ashes and —"

Mr. Burns' instructions came to a sudden end.

"*Jimbo!* Got one myself, I guess," and sure enough he had, though, as Larry took pains to remark, "Not such a nice one as Marty's."

A few minutes later, Marty, who had been watching Mr. Burns, as he took his catch from the hook said, "Well, Mr. Burns I was waiting to see what you were going to do with ashes and you didn't use any. I've been holding my handful here to follow you and now you're fishing again."

Mr. Burns laughed.

"Well, I've been catching eels for twenty years, boy, and I can handle 'em without ashes unless they're specially ornery, but for a new hand ashes are necessary. Just rub 'em on your hands and then take hold of the eel and you'll find you can hold on to him better."

Marty did as he was told, and soon the eel was lying on the bottom of the boat, and Marty was examining with a wry countenance the pasty coating on his hands. "I don't like the smell," he remarked.

"You want to get used to that," Mr. Burns coun-

seled. "No matter how much you scrub, you'll have it with you for several days, so make the best of it."

"Anything with a hide on it like that isn't fit to eat," was Marty's comment.

"But you take the skin off," Larry put in; "even I know that. Haven't you heard about skinning eels?"

"Guess so," Marty answered, reaching over the side of the boat and rinsing his hands in the river.

"That's a mystery we'll introduce you to a little later on," Mr. Burns announced. "That calls for skill, too, but a real fisherman must know how to dress his fish."

As they waited patiently for further "bites," silence settled upon them. There was something in the atmosphere that induced quiet, and their serenity was not broken by further catches.

"Guess we caught the whole family of eels," Mr. Burns said underneath his breath, but he did not suggest that they stop fishing or change their location.

A quarter of an hour passed and then there was borne in upon them a new sound — at first undefined, but gradually growing louder and seemingly coming nearer.

Marty looked at Mr. Burns questioningly. "What's that?"

"Somebody rowing out on the river. Probably

more fishermen. We can't see them, because we're here in this little cove and are shut off from the river proper."

"See 'em!" Larry laughed. "We couldn't see 'em anyway until they got on top of us. It's dark, I'm telling you."

"Maybe they're eelers, too," Mr. Burns observed. "They're about opposite us now — not more'n twenty feet away, I should say, judging by the dip of the oars, just the other side of that strip of land. Perhaps they're coming in here. If they are they've got to go up around the Point and down this side to that opening we came through."

Further speculation as to the intentions of their visitors was cut short by voices floating to them over the water. The words at first were indistinguishable — but it soon became apparent that it was a child, crying, with now and then a harsh word or two interposed in masculine tones.

Marty's heart beat faster. "Larry," he cried, "that's Betsey! I know it is. Oh, Mr. Burns, what are we going to do?" Even in the uncertain light of the kerosene lamp, the boy's agony was visible on his face. "It's my sister, I'm sure — it's Betsey!"

A moment later there was no doubt of it, as there came in childish tones to the ears of the three listeners these words of pleading:

"Oh, Cousin Herman, can't we wait 'til morning? I'm so tired. Please, please!"

Marty stood up in the boat. "I've got to get to her," he said. "I've got to."

"Sit down," Mr. Burns commanded, "and keep still." He had been working fast as he spoke, hauling in the anchor and putting the oars in the locks. "Blow out the lantern," he ordered, "quick!"

"What are you going to do?" Marty asked.

"Follow them," was Mr. Burns' short reply. He was already pulling on the oars with powerful strokes. Then, explaining more fully, he said: "They'll get up to the Point just about the time we get out of the cove. We can then see what their plans are, and if they cross over to the other shore, as I expect they will, they won't have much of a start on us."

"But why should they be crossing over?"

"There's a trolley line over there and a station about opposite here. Knoll Point don't have many trains a day. If you want to get away after six o'clock, the only thing you can do is to row over and take the trolley."

Soon they were at the end of the cove and were slipping out around the bend into the open river. Mr. Burns rested on his oars and peered off into the darkness.

"As I expected. There they go, off yonder.

They're heading for the Meadeville trolley stop all right." Mr. Burns fell to rowing again with all his might. The other boat had progressed in a straight line, while Mr. Burns had had to travel in semi-circular fashion in getting out of the cove. In consequence there was now a considerable distance between the two.

"We must gain on 'em all we can before they see we're chasing them," Mr. Burns said jerkily, and his boat fairly shot through the water, responding splendidly to the skill and strength of one who had been brought up on the river.

"Probably," Mr. Burns panted, "he's after that ten-thirty trolley. Hope we can get in in time to ask him 'why?'"

The boats were, roughly, three hundred feet apart and were being propelled at about the same speed. Not a word was spoken, though Marty's quick breathing and Larry's strained, tense position showed their excitement. As for Mr. Burns, he rowed as he had never rowed before. But it was a race between two good oarsmen, for Mr. Gibbins, too, had spent all the days of his life in a river town. Neither gained perceptibly.

"He knows we're after him now all right, and he's making a desperate effort to get in first," Larry said.

The words acted as a spur to Mr. Burns, and he redoubled his efforts. He gained a foot or two,

he continued to gain, ever so little, it seemed to the anxious watchers, hopelessly little, as Mr. Gibbins was now only a few feet from shore, while Mr. Burns was at least two hundred feet behind.

Marty was unable longer to contain himself. "Betsey," he called, "Betsey, it's Marty — wait for Marty," but there was no answer. He could just barely make out the figures in the forward boat, a big, dark bulk working away at the oars, and a little, huddled bundle in the stern. "Betsey, Betsey, Betsey!" There was a world of anguish in the cry.

The prow of the Gibbins boat struck the sand of the shore with the Burns boat still out in the river a good two hundred feet.

"There they go!" Marty cried out. "He's got her — they're going up the hill. Oh, Mr. Burns, hurry, hurry, hurry! I can't see them any more, I can't see them."

Mr. Burns was breathing hard. "A few more pulls," he said unsteadily, "and we'll be in." As he spoke there was a sharp snap. "My God, I've broken the oar!" he groaned. He drew it in and hastily examined it. The blade had split off "as clean as a whistle." He seemed dazed for a minute, and then: "We'll have to paddle her in," he said, taking his place at the bow. "Good thing we ain't got far to go."

But the oar was unwieldy, the boat heavy, and Mr.

Burns tired from his exhausting struggle. He made slow progress. It took him five minutes to go a distance he would have covered before in one.

Even before the boat was in, Marty was overboard, splashing through the foot or so of water to the shore and running up the hill in the direction in which he had seen Mr. Gibbins disappear. But he was just too late. There was the rumble of an approaching trolley, the glare of its headlight up the road a quarter of a mile, a second's pause — and then the rumble again. Mr. Gibbins had made connections.

CHAPTER XVI

A RIDE THROUGH THE NIGHT

MARTY stumbled blindly down the bank to the boat.

"It's all over," he said thickly.

Mr. Burns regarded him dully, he had hardly recovered his breath, the perspiration still stood in great beads on his forehead, and he was white around the mouth. "Missed it, didn't we?" he muttered. "Sorry."

Marty stepped over to the man who had sunk down in the stern of the boat disconsolately and took him by the hand. "Never mind; you certainly did your part. Nobody could have done more and I'll never forget it. I felt like a weakling, just being a dead weight in that boat, but we only had one pair of oars and I'm not very good at rowing."

Mr. Burns brightened at Marty's words of appreciation. He straightened up. "I do wish we could have got in first. . . ." He struck a match and lit the lantern. "A light makes things look more cheerful," he explained.

Larry came running down the hill toward them. "Well, what's the next step?" Larry always

seemed a source of strength. He was rarely, if ever, dismayed.

"I don't see as there is anything much to do except to go back home," Marty answered.

"Might take the next trolley," Larry suggested.

"What good would that do? Get you up to Norwich about midnight. Where are you going to look for the two of them at that hour?"

"Um, m-m! Guess you're right," Larry agreed. "But it's sort of hard to sit tight and do nothing. In the morning, though, we'll have to make things hum. Hark! What's that? Another trolley so soon?"

"Can't be. No, it's an auto coming along the road up there. Looks as though it was slowing down. Probably having trouble. I guess it's stopped altogether. Jingo! This would be a nice sort of place to get stalled in! Give me an old nag any time." Mr. Burns was rapidly becoming himself again.

But there was no trouble with the automobile, as events speedily proved, for, even while the three down at the water's edge were still discussing the relative merits of motor and equestrian travel two men emerged suddenly out of the darkness. They were big, strapping fellows.

"Very crude work, I should say," the first man remarked. "If you hadn't had your lantern lit I wouldn't have seen you down here at all. Well,

which one is Gibbins? I suppose it's you," indicating Mr. Burns.

"Gibbins!" Marty and Larry cried. "I wish we had him as near as we have got this man."

"What do you mean?" the stranger demanded. "Quick! There's no time to lose."

"Why, simply," Marty answered, "that we've been chasing Gibbins all over this river and he's just got away from us."

"You chasing him! What were you chasing him for?"

"He's got my kid sister and is running away with her and I want her back, but," and Marty stopped suddenly, "who are you and what do you know about Gibbins?"

"Enough," the other replied sharply. "But how did he get away? Where did he go?"

"Took the trolley," Marty replied, "about ten minutes ago, but I'm not going to tell you anything more until you tell me who you are."

In answer the man drew out from his pocket a silver star and held it before Marty's eyes.

"Plain-clothes man!" Marty gasped.

The other laughed. "Are you satisfied now? My name's Stevens."

Marty nodded.

"Well, then," the officer went on, "how old is this sister of yours?"

"Seven."

"How does she come to be with Gibbins?"

"He's my cousin, or at least his wife was, and my sister has been visiting them. Cousin Ella, that was Mr. Gibbins' wife, died last week, and I came up to bring my sister home and —"

"All right, all right," Mr. Stevens broke in, "you can tell me the rest in the car. You're going with me. We might need you to identify this Gibbins. Who are these two others?" indicating Larry and Mr. Burns.

"They are my friends," Marty replied.

"You'll have to leave them here; there isn't room for all. Come along!" Stevens was halfway up the path by the time he had finished speaking.

Marty looked after him hesitatingly. "Nothing to do but go, I suppose," he said to Larry.

"No, and be quick about it," was Larry's advice. "These fellows can help you. You don't know what they've got up their sleeve now, so beat it, boy, beat it! Mr. Burns and I will go home — and I am going to row back. I've never rowed before, but I'm going to learn to-night. I've helped myself to Gibbins' oars, so we're good for at least one breakdown."

"But there'll be no rowing for you to-night, lad," Mr. Burns contradicted. "A dark river and bedtime and rowing lessons don't go together."

They pushed off.

"Good night, Marty. Remember me to Betsey,"

Larry called out gayly. "Suppose I'll see you both in the morning."

"Hope so," Marty answered, as he followed Mr. Stevens.

The automobile was already purring softly, powerfully, when he reached it.

"Jump in here with me, boy," Mr. Stevens, who was on the back seat, ordered. "I want to talk to you. Tom is going to drive — and drive like the devil, too!"

Then began a wild ride through the night, a ride that Marty never was to forget. It seemed in after years like an impossible nightmare. At a death-defying rate, they tore over uneven country roads, down hills and up hills, through sandy stretches where the car skidded, around bends on two wheels, stopping at nothing, fearing nothing. Trees, houses, fields, fences all ran together in an indistinct, blurred ribbon of dark green of endless length.

And all the while Marty was supposed to be in such a frame of mind that he could answer questions intelligently. For Mr. Stevens, seemingly indifferent to the catastrophe that must inevitably cap this mad chase, sat back on the car's luxurious cushions as comfortable as the very fickle road would allow him to be and asked innumerable questions. He asked and he asked and he asked, but he gave precious little information himself. All that Marty could learn was that they were on their way to Nor-

wich, and that they expected to arrive there in time to greet Mr. Gibbins as he descended from the trolley; but this cool stranger's interest in Mr. Gibbins — that was still unsolved.

When Marty had become accustomed somewhat to the car's speed and the weirdness of the ride through the black country the driver slowed down, and about the same time the road became wider and smoother and a few moments later they shot out onto a paved street and joined the trolley tracks. Stevens leaned out of the car and peered anxiously in both directions.

"You've done it, Tom, old man," he said. "The trolley isn't in yet. I thought there was a good chance of getting here first, because you know these trolleys make a stop of fifteen minutes up at the Lotusville Junction. Drive to the next trolley station and we will wait there. It would be a little better to nab our friend before we get into the town proper."

Marty could stand it no longer. "Tell me," he begged, "what you have to do with Mr. Gibbins? 'Tisn't anything about Betsey, is it?"

Mr. Stevens deliberated for a moment. Then: "No, it isn't anything about Betsey, and I don't know why I shouldn't tell you. Mr. Gibbins is wanted for improper use of post office money."

"What do you mean — that he's dishonest?"

"That's about it. He's had an elaborate sys-

tem for defrauding the government with faked post office money orders. We've been on his trail for some little time just waiting to get the evidence. We got it yesterday, and then a new man on the force sort of spilled the beans; let the cat out of the bag, in other words, and Gibbins got wise. That's what he's making his get-away to-night for. 'Tisn't to keep your sister from you; it's simply to escape the law."

"Well, how did you ever come to be looking for Gibbins over in Meadeville at ten o'clock at night?"

"Simple enough; we were planning to arrest him to-night as we knew he was wise to what was doing through the fluke our man had made, and we didn't dare lose any time, knowing he might try to get away. But we didn't move quite quickly enough. When the detective got to Knoll Point late in the evening Gibbins had disappeared. It was easy enough to figure out how he'd gone. There hadn't been a train; his auto was still in the barn; there was only the river left. Our man phoned the Norwich office at once and they got me on the job. It was a cinch he'd be making for the trolley at Meadeville, so there's where I headed for. But the old sinner had too much of a start on me. We'll get him yet, though. And now is it all clear?"

Marty smiled. "Clearer," he said. Silence for a moment, then: "But tell me, Mr. Stevens, why wouldn't he let me have Betsey when I went for her

this afternoon? I can't see any reason for that. You'd have thought he'd have been glad to be rid of her."

"Probably afraid the kid might give something away. Most likely she'd heard or seen something; children are into everything, and all ears, you know. 'A guilty conscience needs no accuser.' If he had the girl with him, he could control what she said to a degree, and he wasn't going to run any unnecessary risk of having something leak out. Besides he was making his plans then for this little trip to-night and he didn't want to be delayed. If you were hanging around the house in the afternoon with your sister, it might be hard to get rid of you in the evening. It was best to send you away, before he was face to face with emergency. It's as clear as the nose on your face." Stevens ended suddenly with: "Ah! there comes our car, and now to see if our man is on it."

Stevens stepped out to the side of the road and signaled the approaching trolley. It stopped, Stevens boarded it, spoke a word or two to the conductor on the platform, and then went inside. There were few passengers, and at first glance Stevens saw his man. He was sitting well toward the front of the car, his head sunk forward, his eyes closed. Betsey was curled up in the seat facing him, asleep.

Stevens touched the man on the arm. "Gibbins,"

he said, "you're wanted outside. Come along and make no fuss." He exhibited his badge of office as he spoke. Gibbins blinked for a moment at the shining shield in the officer's palm and then, with a great sigh, rose and followed Stevens.

In pursuance of Stevens' instructions, Marty had waited outside. "Where's Betsey?" he asked anxiously, as the two men appeared.

"She's inside, sleeping. I thought you might like to go in and get her. She needn't know anything about this other business. Better for a child like her not to," he added.

Marty ran into the car and up to the seat where his sister was still sleeping. "Betsey," he called softly, "Betsey, wake up, Marty's here." Betsey opened her eyes and looked at him for a moment uncertainly.

"Oh, brother," she said and threw her arms around his neck.

The motorman clanged his bell, and Marty, hearing the warning, took his sister's hand and led her down the aisle and outside.

They found Stevens waiting for them. The automobile and the driver, with Mr. Gibbins, had gone.

"I thought it best to get rid of him before you got around with the little kid," he explained in an undertone to Marty. "Now, then, you two are coming home with me. I just live a few blocks from here, and the 'missus' will be mighty glad to

take care of you. You must be tired, both of you, after your exciting rides. Are you tired, little girl?" he asked, bending over Betsey.

"Yes, sir," she answered, smiling, "I am tired, but I don't care any more, now Marty's come. Where's Cousin Herman?"

"He's gone off with another man."

"Oh," she said, "I guess Cousin Herman's sick. He's been pretty nice to me all except for the last few days, and then he wouldn't let me play nor anything. Don't you think he's sick?"

"Yes, I guess he is." Mr. Stevens took the little girl up in his strong arms, "and you will be sick, too, if you don't get to bed pretty soon."

CHAPTER XVII

"MUSHROOM DAY — MUSHROOM DAY!"

"AND now for home. How does that sound, Betsey — home?"

"And mother? Will she be there, too?"

"Course she will, and won't she be glad to see you!"

"And I'll be glad to see her," Betsey added.

It was a beautiful morning. From the dining-room window of the Stevens home the Clearwater River could be seen, a sparkling band of blue flecked with tiny whitecaps. Everything was bright and cheery, a contrast to the grim, forbidding darkness of the night before.

"Did you sleep well?" Mrs. Stevens asked as she came into the room, bearing steaming breakfast dishes.

"I certainly did, and I guess Betsey did too. Surely we slept long enough. Why didn't you call us earlier?"

"Well, it was so late when you got to bed that I thought you should sleep until you woke up," Mrs. Stevens answered. "Besides, it's only nine o'clock.

And how are you, little girl, this morning?" turning to Betsey.

"I'm fine, thank you," Betsey replied primly.

"Good! Now then for a bit to eat."

During the meal, Marty made his plans. Mr. Stevens, who had gone to his work, had left word that he would not require the boy any longer, and had suggested that if he were so disposed he could get a train for Westvale at 11:05.

"I think that's just what we'll do. We'd get home, then, early this afternoon. But what'll I do about Larry?" And he explained about his friend.

"You could phone him, if you liked," Mrs. Stevens suggested. "The minister at Knoll Point lives near the Burns and would be glad to take a message. I know him, I'll attend to it for you if you wish."

"You're very kind. If you'll phone him that we're going home on the 11:05 train and ask him to bring my traps with him when he comes, I'd be so much obliged."

"Oh, I can't leave Emma Jane," Betsey suddenly put in.

"Emma Jane? Who's she?"

"The rag doll Cousin Ella made for me. And I got lots of other things up there to Cousin Ella's. Can't we go get 'em?"

"Clothes, you mean?"

"No, I got most of my clothes in the bag, but

Cousin Herman wouldn't let me take the other things. He said they was just junk."

"I don't think we'd better take the time to get them now, as long as you've got your dresses and necessary articles," Marty said.

"I got them, but I would like my junk, specially Emma Jane. She's been lots of comfort."

"Don't worry about her. We'll get mother to make you another one, heaps nicer."

"All right, then," Betsey agreed, though not enthusiastically. Jumping down from her chair she ran to the door, her attention fortunately caught by a sleek cat basking in the sun on the porch. "Is that your cat?" she asked and without waiting for a reply she stepped out and began to stroke the animal's glossy fur. "Nice kitty — m-m-m — nice old pussycat."

When she was out of hearing, Marty turned to Mrs. Stevens. "I can't tell you how grateful we are for your kindness. I hope some time you may meet my mother. She will make you understand."

"I'd like to meet your mother," Mrs. Stevens returned cordially.

There was an awkward pause; then: "Can you tell me anything more about Mr. Gibbins?" Marty asked.

"Yes, Mr. Stevens told me to say to you that Mr. Gibbins had broken down and confessed. I think even my husband was sorry for him. He said he

seemed like a big, strong man that had made a mistake and had had to keep on doing things that were not right because of his first false step. He will be punished, but perhaps it won't go so hard with him as it appeared it would at first."

"I am glad I haven't got to see him again, and I'm glad, too, that Betsey doesn't need to know."

"Yes, it's just as well. My husband said he wouldn't need you, as you were not mixed up in the case in which he's interested. If you'd been able to give any information in that direction he'd probably be holding you."

"I'm glad I can go. I haven't been happy since we let Betsey go away, and I'm crazy to get back home with her."

To Marty time had never moved so slowly as it did that morning. Each minute seemed like ten! But at last 11:05 came and with it the train for Westvale. Once aboard, the train barely crawled — or so Marty would have stoutly maintained — and yet they arrived in Westvale almost on schedule time!

No one was on the lookout at home for them, for it had been understood that they would not return until the next day at the earliest. Consequently brother and sister walked right into the sitting room before any one heard or saw them. This had been

exactly as Betsey had wanted it, for all the way up from the station she had kept saying over and over again: "Now, let's s'prise her; let's s'prise her."

And indeed they did "s'prise her." Mrs. Kelly hearing a footstep glanced up from her sewing and her eyes fell upon the little girl standing in front of the tall, dark, serious-looking boy. The napkin she was hemming fell from her hands. "Betsey!" she cried, rising quickly and holding out her arms.

Betsey ran to her and was caught in a swift embrace.

"Oh, it's so good, so good to see my little girl again." Mrs. Kelly pressed her face against the child's. "I've missed you, nobody knows how I've missed you."

"I'll never go away any more, mumsey, so don't cry. I like it lots better here and I wanted you so much." There were signs that Betsey herself was near to tears.

"But what are we crying about? Everything's perfect again and you did have a good time, didn't you, dear?"

"Yes," doubtfully, "some of the time. All 'cept when Cousin Herman ran away last night and took me with him in the boat and Marty came and we stayed in Mrs. Stevens' house and —"

"What's all this? I don't understand," Mrs. Kelly looked at Marty inquiringly.

"Betsey doesn't like traveling at night," Marty explained, passing his mother a significant look, "but it's all over now."

"Yes, it's all over now," Betsey agreed, "but how's Cousin Herman? — that's what I'd like to know. He's sick and oh, how's papa? He's sick, too, isn't he?"

There was a puzzled look on Mrs. Kelly's face, but she refrained from asking further questions at that time.

"Where's dad?" Marty asked.

"Oh, he's up at the mine with Hen. He went there yesterday morning and then again this afternoon. He seems to make the trip easier each time." Mrs. Kelly smiled happily. "And oh"— she went on suddenly as though something had just occurred to her —"Mr. Lanier was here yesterday."

"Mr. Lanier? Not the Lanier of Lanier & Co., Newton City, dealers in fancy fruits and vegetables?"

"Yes, the very same. He's more than a dealer, it seems. He's a grower as well, and has interests in half a dozen enterprises."

"What did he want?"

"Just wanted to look around your mushroom farm as he calls it. Had heard of your experiment and was interested in it."

"Humph! that's funny," was Marty's comment. "Did Hen show him around the mine?"

"Yes, I guess so, but you'll have to ask Hen and your father for the particulars."

"That's what I'm going to do and right away. I've been away from the mine for two days and it seems like two years. Me for my old stamping ground right now."

He dashed out of the room. A joyful yelp greeted him in the yard.

"Hello, Spac!" He stooped over and caught the dog's head in his hands. "Glad to see me, aren't you, old boy? Come on, now, I'll race you to the mine"— and the boy and dog disappeared up the road in a whirl of dust.

About half the distance to the Bluffs they met Mr. Kelly and Hen, returning.

"Oh, boy!" Hen sang out as Marty came up to him, "you're just in time. The mushrooms are up."

"They are?" incredulously.

"Yes! Come, hurry! I'll show you." Hen turned and sped back to the mine, Marty running by his side and Spac following, barking and enjoying the excitement thoroughly. Mr. Kelly looked after them hesitatingly — and longingly — and then sat down by the roadside to await their return.

"Tell me," Marty said as they hurried along, "about this Lanier. What do you suppose he wants?"

"He said he simply was interested in your experiment," Hen answered.

"Professor Newcombe has sort of prejudiced me against him, I guess. He says he's crafty and unreliable. I'd just as soon he'd kept away."

"What harm could his visit possibly do?" Hen asked.

"I don't know — I guess there isn't any reason for my feeling. Only I've got the idea Lanier isn't interested in a thing unless he sees some chance of turning it to his own account some way."

"Oh, well, cheer up! I don't believe he can put anything over on you this time, and now then, here we are. Allow me to introduce you to as thriving a crop of mushrooms as you'd care to see." With a grand flourish, Hen threw open the mine door.

Sure enough there had been a change in the mushroom beds, the change which had been so eagerly anticipated. Little yellowish white points were now pricking through the surface in dozens of places.

"They're up! They're up!" Marty shouted joyously. "They're up!"

He flashed his light first on one bed and then on another.

"They're growing in every bed," he cried. "See there and there — and there. Oh, you dear little white points! Come on, now, shoot straight up and grow until you're as big as umbrellas."

He grabbed Hen and with him executed a weird dance in and out among the beds, a dance rendered

all the more fantastic by the shadows which the lantern cast on the rough tunnel's interior.

"But this won't do," Marty broke off; "I must go and tell —"

"Tell the truckman to call for the first load of vegetables, I suppose."

"In a couple of weeks — yes. But now I must tell Professor Newcombe. He'll be glad — as glad as I am. You take father home; I'll follow soon."

It was not Professor Newcombe who next heard the good news, but Wilda Bennett. Marty saw her shortly after he had left Hen and his father and was hurrying off to the professor's bungalow. She was on the opposite side of the street, and he ran over to her, calling out gayly:

"Mushroom day! Mushroom day! That's what I'm going to say all this livelong day instead of 'good day.'"

"Oh, Marty, then they are up?"

"Yes, they are up; dozens, hundreds, thousands of them."

"Glorious! You will be a millionaire."

"Well," skeptically, "I'm not so sure of that, but think I may be a mushroomaire. Now I've got to hurry along and tell Professor Newcombe and then we're going to go down and watch 'em grow."

He went along a few steps and then sang out:

" I'm going to send you the first one that's picked, Wilda, to be cooked with a nice beefsteak."

" If you do," Wilda flung back, " I shall not cook it with beefsteak, I shall preserve it in alcohol."

CHAPTER XVIII

LANIER MAKES AN OFFER

THE mushrooms grew rapidly, and in what seemed an incredibly short time they were ready for picking.

"Yes, boy," Professor Newcombe remarked, "once they stick their heads above ground it isn't long before they're full grown, but it takes them a powerful long time underneath there to get started. It's a wonderful crop you're going to have!" The professor surveyed the three beds with just pride. "It's to-morrow, isn't it, that you take the first picking in to Blanchard?"

"Yes, to-morrow, and the next day we have our mushroom ball."

"Of course; so we do, so we do," the professor agreed.

"You'll come, won't you?"

"Of course! I wouldn't miss it for anything. You're going to have it here?"

"Right here. We're going to have it all fixed up with Japanese lanterns so you won't know the place. And Lize, the Bennetts' colored Mammy, is going to do the cooking. Mostly vegetables but, oh, how

she can cook 'em — roasted corn and yellow squash and — but that would be telling — and mushrooms, of course, heaps of them. It's the finest bunch of people in the world that's coming and I do want 'em to have a good time."

"It's the same crowd that we had at the time of the cave-in, isn't it?"

Marty nodded. "Yes, even to Doc Goddard and Mrs. Bennett. Larry Reed'll be here too, this time."

"Fine boys and girls, they are," Professor Newcombe said.

"And the seat at the head of the table is reserved for you," Marty explained.

"Oh, not for me," Professor Newcombe protested, though he was evidently pleased at the thought.

"Of course for you — haven't you been my partner? We're going to set the table up in the other tunnel where the German agents had their printing press. We've got it all ready now, built out of old boxes and planks, and we'll cover it over with something white."

"Are you going back to school in the fall, Marty?" Professor Newcombe changed the subject abruptly. "That seems quite a ways off, I know, but really it isn't, and it's well to be making plans."

"I don't know yet. Of course while our mushrooms have grown, there isn't any money coming

in from them yet and there won't be for some little time. I'm sure they'll pay in the end, but I don't know about school for the present. Dad's pretty strong, but he couldn't take a regular job. I think probably I'd better be looking for something to do for the winter. You won't be needing me much longer around your place and I've got to keep a little money flowing into the family treasury."

"Mm — well, we'll see. I shall want you through August, anyway, and perhaps something will develop in the meantime — maybe Blanchard will have a suggestion. He's a fine man, is Blanchard. I've known him for years."

"You think he's a better one to sell the mushrooms to than Lanier?"

"It's my opinion that he is — but I'd sell to the one that made the best proposition. You can compare notes after you've seen them both."

"Does Blanchard do as big a business as Lanier? Somehow it seems as though one heard more about Lanier & Co."

"That's because Lanier advertises more," Professor Newcombe replied. "Blanchard has just as large a trade and he's a grower, too. I hope it will seem wise to tie up with him. Well, I must be going along now, I guess."

"Whatever you do," Marty cautioned, "don't forget the mushroom ball, to-morrow, at seven o'clock."

The professor nodded and turned to the nearest exit. Marty took his arm affectionately and walked out with him.

The professor had hardly gone when Marty had another caller. The boy was just about to leave for the day when he heard a fumbling at the door and, going to open it, found a man there.

"I am looking for Martin Kelly," the stranger said.

"Right here! What can he do for you?"

The man extended his hand. "I'm Lanier, Robert Lanier, you know. You weren't here when I called before, but your father and your friend showed me around. It's an unusual experiment you are trying, Kelly. I'm a mushroom grower myself and I'm watching what you are doing with a great deal of interest."

"You are very kind," Marty said and waited.

"I thought perhaps you would invite me in and let me see how your crop is coming along," Mr. Lanier said after a moment. "Is it growing as it should?"

"Yes," Marty replied none too cordially, "in fact, I'm expecting to take the first mushrooms to market to-morrow."

"I hope you are going to let me have them," Mr. Lanier suggested.

"That depends. I'm going to sell them to the

person who pays me the most. I'm in this for money, you see."

"Yes, yes, yes," Mr. Lanier agreed. "I think Lanier & Co. can pay you quite as much as any one. May I come in and see the beds?"

Marty led the way back to the mushrooms.

"Wonderful; wonderful!" Mr. Lanier cried. "I've never seen better mushrooms. It speaks well for your care, my boy. You must have had expert advice in the preparation of the compost."

"I had the very best advice in the country, I think."

"I am delighted," Lanier continued, "at your success, delighted! I congratulate you."

"Thank you!"

"I — I — I — suppose that — I suppose that, now that you've had — had your little fling you won't be trying it any more?"

"Trying it? I don't understand."

"Why, mushroom growing is hard work, and now that you have shown what you can do you're satisfied, aren't you? You won't want to keep on raising mushrooms, will you?" Mr. Lanier laughed and slapped Marty on the back. "Too monotonous, eh?"

"Oh, but that's exactly what I do expect to do," Marty contradicted. "I want to go into it more extensively and have all the tunnels given over to

beds. One could raise heaps and heaps of mushrooms here, and I mean to do it."

"Oh, I thought it was simply play for you. I was going to suggest that you let me have the mine now, as raising mushrooms is my business, or part of it. I thought perhaps I could buy the lease from you — you have a lease, I assume?"

"Oh, yes, I have a lease," Marty answered, with heart beating high. "But you couldn't buy it, Mr. Lanier, because if mushrooms are to be grown in this mine I'm going to grow them."

"I'll pay a premium for your lease," Lanier said. "You see," with an appearance of frankness, "I have got to get more mushrooms for my market. I must either build a mushroom cellar, and that would be quite an expense, or I must get something like this. Now I'll make it worth your while to let me have this. How long does your lease run?"

"I couldn't think of selling out for any figure," Marty replied, ignoring altogether the latter question.

"Little stubborn, are you? Well, I admire stubbornness," and there was a genial look in the man's eyes. "Go to it, lad, only I wish I'd seen this mine first. Anyhow, I'm much obliged to you — and let me have a chance at the crop. I won't blacklist you, for I admire your pluck." With a curt little nod, Lanier departed.

Marty stood at the door thoughtfully watching

him as he walked away. There was a puzzled expression on his face. After a moment he went inside, got his hat, gave a final touch to things, and hurried off. There could be no harm in trying the scheme he had in mind anyway.

Down .through Westvale's residential streets he hurried right into the little business section and up to an office building from one of the front windows of which hung a sign reading, " S. Reynolds, Real Estate, Insurance, Notary Public." Marty glanced up at it doubtfully and then started up the stone steps leading to the entrance. As he did so a man came out of the door and ran down the steps to the street.

Marty thought there was something familiar about the figure and turned to look at him. It was Mr. Lanier! A sickening thought crossed his mind. Was he too late? He opened the door and went in.

Mr. Reynolds was in, the office boy informed him, and a moment later, " Yes, he will see you."

" Well, Kelly, are you sick of your bargain and want your money back, or what is the reason that I am honored with this call?" Reynolds began genially.

" Mr. Reynolds, I can't beat around the bush at all "— there was a helpless note in Marty's voice. " The mushrooms are going to grow all right in that old mine. I've seen enough to be convinced of that. Now, I want to know if you will let me take a lease on the mine for say five years. I don't know any-

thing about the formal proceedings, whether you expect me to pay you something in advance or what, but I wish we could bind the bargain some way."

"What's your anxiety?" Mr. Reynolds asked.

"I — I think somebody else is likely to rent it," Marty faltered. "Give me an option on it. Isn't that what you call it? If it takes money, I'll raise it somehow."

"The mine is rented, Kelly. A new lease has already been made out and signed to begin when your lease expires. If I'd only realized how popular that old place was going to be, all of a sudden, I'd have raised the price good and high, too," Reynolds concluded brusquely.

"Rented!" Marty cried disconsolately.

Mr. Reynolds nodded.

"Well," and Marty's tone was expressionless, "I suppose there is nothing more to say." He rose and walked to the door.

"Buck up, lad," Reynolds called after him. "You can grow an awful lot of mushrooms between now and the beginning of the next lease; that is, if they grow as rapid as folks say."

But Marty did not hear his words. He walked down the steps mechanically and up the street, saying over and over to himself, "Why didn't I do it before? Lanier's got the mine. He found I only had it for a year. Why didn't I see Reynolds before?"

As he neared home, he straightened up and threw back his shoulders. They mustn't know about it. They couldn't help it and they had things enough to worry about without that. He had been keeping his troubles to himself so long that it was becoming second nature to do so. Besides, a lot of things might happen, he supposed, between now and — Lanier. As he put his hand in his pocket for his latchkey his fingers touched a square envelope. He drew it out. Ah, yes, a very special invitation to Wilda Bennett for the mushroom ball. To be sure he had asked her verbally several times and she had agreed to come, but still in the joyousness of the evening before, he had written her a personal note, "engraved by mine own hand" was his own description of it, telling her again how much he counted on her presence.

He looked at the missive ruefully. "The mushroom ball," he thought skeptically. Well, it wouldn't be the wonderful affair he had planned. There would be a dark cloud hanging over it all. Still, he supposed he would have to go through with it now. He went back to the corner and dropped the envelope into the mail box.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MUSHROOM BALL

THE next day it rained, rained in torrents from early morning until after dark. Marty stood around the house dismally, one moment deciding to go to market with his mushrooms as he had planned, the next reversing his decision and determining to wait for fairer weather.

"It doesn't make any special difference, I suppose," he finally remarked to his mother, "whether I go to-day or the day after to-morrow. I can't go to-morrow because we have our party —"

"The mushroom ball as you call it?" Mrs. Kelly put in gayly.

"Um, um! Perhaps it would be better to wait until after the party to see how many mushrooms we have left to sell. We may eat an awful lot."

And so it was left and the day wore on.

"It'll be nice if it is like this to-morrow," Marty observed glumly later that afternoon when the skies were still gray and the rain still fell.

But it wasn't like that! During the night a brisk wind rose, clearing the skies, and the morning dawned fair and brilliant.

"Nothing the matter with this day for your mushroom ball, son," Mr. Kelly said as he came into the dining room for breakfast.

"No," Marty agreed unenthusiastically.

"Just 'no'?" Mr. Kelly objected. "Why, things are greener and fresher than they've been for weeks. We needed that rain — even if it did hold up your trip to Newton City."

"Um, hm."

Mr. Kelly looked at his son questioningly. "What's the matter, Martin? Don't you feel well this morning?"

"Fine, father; why?"

"Oh, you seem so sort of disinterested. This ought to be a big day for you — a happy day, I mean."

"Why, just because I've proved that mushrooms can be grown in the mine? That won't feed us and clothe us. I haven't actually accomplished anything."

"Son!" Mrs. Kelly spoke sternly. "That's not fair to yourself. You've worked hard for the professor in the hot fields for weeks; without the money that you earned that way I don't know how we'd have got along. That's accomplishing something, I'm sure. More than that, you've proved that mushrooms will grow in the mine; there'll be a tidy little sum coming in from your first crop and you can invest that in more materials and go into

the business on a larger scale. I think probably you could borrow some money — now that everybody sees it isn't a foolish idea — and plant the whole mine full. You've no ground to be discouraged; you ought, instead, to be very happy."

Marty pushed his chair back from the table. "Are you happy, mother? And you, dad? Good! Then I'll be too!"

"Ah, that's better; spoken like my old son, Martin. You've been awfully grumpy for a day or two."

"Well, I'll have to be specially good-natured to make up for it. Keep your eye on me from now on — you'll see. But"— and Marty laughed — "you'll have to be quick of eye, because I'm going to be rushing around." He picked up his hat from the chair where he had tossed it when he came into the room. "This is my busy day. I've heaps and heaps to do before night." He walked to the door and stepped out. "You'll be up to the mine soon, I suppose, dad? You'll find me there all right — and radiating sunshine. So long!"— and he was off.

He wondered how happy and contented they would be if they knew all that he knew. It was a pity, such a pity, that he had lost the mine!

Arrived at the mine, Marty at once began to make it a fit scene for the celebration of the evening. First of all there were Japanese lanterns to be hung in all the tunnels. He had borrowed nearly one

hundred from a friend who had been chairman of a lawn fête where they had been used. By an arrangement of ropes he was able to string a line of lights from the entrance down into the central chamber where were located the mushroom beds; here his scheme of decoration became more elaborate, the lights fairly covering the rough ceiling. From this "blaze of glory," another string of lights extended up another tunnel and ended in a glow of radiance over the improvised table.

He had just finished putting up the last lantern when he heard his name spoken.

"Yes?" he turned and walked in the direction from which the voice had come. "It's you, isn't it, Professor Newcombe?"

"It is, my boy. A wonderful place you've made out of this dingy old hole in the ground."

"You like it, do you? I'm so glad, but I'll have to hurry around and blow out the candles or they'll burn out too soon to-night. I lit 'em all because I wanted to see the effect."

"All right, plunge us into darkness, then," the professor agreed, "but be quick about it, for Mr. Blanchard is here."

"Blanchard here!"

"Yes. I thought I wouldn't bring him in without your permission. I sort of invited him to come and look the ground over. He didn't expect to come until he had seen the mushrooms, but I — I "— the

professor seemed to be at a loss for words—"I rather advised him to come to-day."

"You advised him to come to-day?"

"There are phones, my boy, and Newton City isn't so far away. I thought perhaps it would be a satisfaction to you to know something about your prospects before the mushroom ball was on. Might lend it a gayer and more festive character, don't you know."

"Oh! Well, I'll put out the lights and be right back. You can bring Mr. Blanchard in, of course, just as if you didn't know that. You might get him while I make the rounds."

When Marty returned a few moments later he found the professor and another man earnestly engaged in conversation. He stood at a distance for a moment, and then the professor got sight of him.

"Ah, Mr. Blanchard, this is my young friend, Martin Kelly, the mushroom grower."

Marty laughed. "I guess Mr. Blanchard knows how far I would have got growing mushrooms if it hadn't been for Professor Newcombe," Marty said as he took the hand which Blanchard extended to him.

"Now don't you let him mislead you, my dear Bob," Professor Newcombe cut in, taking Blanchard's arm intimately. "If I hadn't been on hand to give him a little advice he would have found some one else to do it. He's that sort, see?"

"Seems to be a mutual admiration party," Mr. Blanchard observed. "Well, anyhow, I won't enter into the whys and wherefores. I only know that you've got some wonderful beds of mushrooms here, as fine as any I have ever seen, and Newcombe says you did it. He's an old friend and I dare not dispute his word."

"I am glad you like them," was Marty's somewhat embarrassed reply.

"I do and I want to buy them."

"That's what they're for," Marty said; "that is, that's what those that are left after to-night's celebration are for. What are mushrooms worth?"

"What would you say," Mr. Blanchard asked after a moment, apparently ignoring Marty's question, "if I should make you a general proposition?"

"Do you mean that you would buy all of the crop and pay me so much for it?"

"I mean more than that." Mr. Blanchard stopped and looked at Marty squarely. Then he looked away thoughtfully and then back at the boy again. Professor Newcombe meanwhile had walked off to the farthest bed and was examining the growth in the farthest corner of that bed.

"Lad," Mr. Blanchard began, "you have a friend at court."

"As if I didn't know that!" Marty exclaimed.

"He has put up to me a suggestion, and I have been turning it over in my mind for weeks. It has

looked pretty good to me all the time and since I have seen your mushrooms and the general layout of the mine it has looked even better. How would you like to have me —" Mr. Blanchard paused tantalizingly.

"Yes, sir, I'm listening," Marty said.

"How would you like to have me," Mr. Blanchard repeated, "take over the operation of this mine and go into the mushroom-growing business on a large scale? There'd be a good job for you, and your father could be installed as general caretaker."

"Oh, it would be wonderful if —"

Mr. Blanchard went on, absorbed in his own idea: "There wouldn't be any reason why you couldn't go back to school in September. All the time you'd have to give to the work, you could give outside of school hours. Your father would be able to attend to the details. It looks like a pretty good stunt to me! We could have hundreds of beds in here and make a big thing out of it. I am ready to put money into it if you say the word. There would be a modest salary in it for your father, enough to live on, and as for you, well, you'd get your share." Mr. Blanchard stopped. "What do you say?"

"It's too late," Marty answered.

"Too late?"

"Yes, my lease expires next year and Lanier will take over the mine then; he got ahead of me."

"Lanier! Why, I thought Newcombe said — who told you Lanier had leased it?"

"Nobody told me, but he was here a couple of days ago and he tried to get me to sell out and I wouldn't. He was so eager to get the mine, however, that I thought I'd better see about taking out a lease for a period of years myself, and I went right down to Reynolds, the agent. Just as I was going into his office, Lanier came out, and when I saw Reynolds he told me the mine was leased and he couldn't do anything for me. So, of course, Lanier's got it. Who else?"

Professor Newcombe, who had been gradually edging nearer and nearer to the two, and whose interest in the mushroom beds had seemed to be growing less and less, now interrupted.

"I happened to hear that last remark of yours, Marty. I am sorry about this Lanier proposition. If it weren't for that, though, you'd be prepared to accept Mr. Blanchard's terms, wouldn't you?"

"Accept 'em? I'd love 'em!" Marty said. "But what's the use? Is there a chance that Lanier might give in?"

"I never knew Lanier to give in on anything if he could help it," Blanchard volunteered.

"No, I don't suppose so." It almost seemed to Marty that the professor chuckled as he said the words. "But if he couldn't help it, he'd have to

give in, wouldn't he? Come along, Bob, let's talk it over and see if there's anything to be done. Somehow I have the feeling Lanier isn't going to grow mushrooms in this mine. I — I certainly have that feeling! Curious, isn't it?"

"Oh, if only it might be so! The thing has had me worried."

"Worrying and gardening never go together. Haven't I often told you that, lad? But I forget, you've work to do. You might, if you wanted to be real hospitable, ask Blanchard here to come to your party to-night. He's staying over with me and I think would like to."

"Why, of course, I'd be mighty glad to have him come."

"I'll be on hand, then, boy." Mr. Blanchard smiled genially.

"And as for you, Marty, I wouldn't dismiss this proposition of Mr. Blanchard's from my mind," Professor Newcombe advised. "There may be some way of making it work yet. Stranger things than that have happened. Blanchard and I'll take a look into conditions to-day and see — what we shall see."

Without giving Marty a chance to get into the conversation again, the professor hurried to the door, arm in arm with Blanchard. "We'll be here again at seven," he called back, "and don't forget to cook an extra fat mushroom for Bob."

The professor's remarks seemed to revive Marty's spirits. Perhaps, after all, there would be a way out; Lanier might, he supposed, be persuaded to make some sort of an arrangement that would not be wholly unpleasant. When he subjected his new courage to cold analysis, Marty could find little basis for it. It must have been something in the professor's manner that had heartened him, something intangible, but none the less real. All during the day he was buoyed up by this new hope, and when evening came the last trace of his morning's despair had disappeared.

Larry was the first of the guests to arrive. "I'm part of the family, you know," he explained, "or at least, I feel as though I was, and I thought maybe you'd want some help."

"Nothing to do; Lize has got everything in hand and she doesn't like any interference. She just told me to 'g'wan away'; said she knew how to cook a meal, even in a cave, without men fussing around!" Marty laughed. "But I'm glad you came early, anyhow, so you can tell me how you like the looks of things."

"Great! I didn't think you could do it. And doesn't it suggest romance and adventure? We're going to have a bully time, to-night, I can see that — you'd have to in such surroundings!"

"And just think, Larry, all this came out of our visit up here in the spring and your happening to

find a toadstool. I'm sure there's a pretty big chance for some one right here —"

"For some one? Why not for you?" Larry looked at his friend in surprise.

"Perhaps — perhaps. I'd like to be sure it was for me."

Before he could explain what he meant, Mrs. Bennett and Wilda came.

"It's just like fairyland," Wilda cried delightedly. "The lanterns make it wonderful. I thought it was going to be stuffy in here, but it isn't a bit!"

"Of course not! You have to have good ventilation to grow mushrooms."

"I'm just dying to see them, Marty — where are they?" Wilda asked eagerly.

"If you will permit me, ladies, I will escort you into their august presences," and giving his arm to Mrs. Bennett with elaborate grace, Marty led the way to the mushroom chamber.

"My, what a lot of them!" Wilda exclaimed at sight of the display. "Mother, look there and there and there and there! Three beds just full! Oh, you dear, cunning little things!" She bent down over the mushrooms.

Mrs. Bennett joined her. "Any one would think you were talking about chickens. How *interesting,* I should say."

"Any one would think *you* were talking about a *book,* mother dear," Wilda parried.

There was a rush outside and, unannounced, Bert Simmons burst upon the scene. "'How interesting!' did I hear you remark? I should say, rather, how expensive! I just priced them in one of the Newton stores: $1.00 per! Excuse me. But say, old man," turning to Marty, "I feel like Ali Baba coming into a cave of riches. It all has an Aladdin's lamp atmosphere. Most effective, most effective."

He surveyed the scene as though through a lorgnette. "Your scheme of decoration is, as Mrs. Patmore Smythe would observe, 'charmingly unusual,' but," in a stage whisper, "when do we eat and where? A mushroom ball doesn't mean, does it, that we pick 'em up from the ground and eat 'em raw the way we do green onions?"

"I should say not! You can't eat those down there," Marty replied. "Those are going to be sold, but —"

"Now, Bertie, don't you know," Wilda chided, "that when you go to parties it isn't polite to talk about the food?"

"Well, I'll try to be good," and Bert walked primly over to a chair, sat down, and folded his hands.

Soon the others came — Dr. Goddard, Professor Newcombe, Mr. Blanchard, Alice Fielding, Hen Elliott and all of the cast of "She Stoops to Conquer," and finally Mr. and Mrs. Kelly with Spac,

for Marty had insisted that the dog be present.

When the interior of the mine and the mushroom beds had been examined to the satisfaction of every one the party proceeded to the "dining room" where the huge, good-natured darky, Mammy Lize, held sway.

"Ise all ready for you," she announced, "Ise all ready."

It was a merry company that sat down amidst a clatter of chairs on the hard earthen floor, Professor Newcombe at the head of the table, Mrs. Bennett at the foot, Dr. Goddard in the middle of one long side, Mr. Blanchard facing him.

"We're all quartered up," Bert said, "first a person to keep order, then some likely disturbers of the peace, then another order keeper and so on. Beautiful arrangement, Marty, beautiful! But before your attention is wholly given over to Mammy's cooking — and believe me it's going to be great"— with a smile in the direction of the grinning negress who stood arms akimbo in the background —"I want to make a little announcement!"

"'Ray! 'Ray! Speech!" Hen Elliott called out.

"Be still, boy, or I'll make you do it yourself! Really *he* should, because he's all mixed up in what I'm going to say; but he's such a shrinking violet, he can't. I tried to foist it off on Larry Reed too —

but he pleaded some excuse or other, I've forgotten what. So the burden fell on poor me!"

Bert paused and his audience waited expectantly. Then he went on: "It isn't so much a speech, anyhow, as it is a presentation." He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a long envelope which he extended across the table to Marty.

"Allow me," he said, "to hand you a five years' lease on this mine, secured through the foresight, the business sagacity of our mutual friend, Hen Elliott. Oh, I'm well up on social etiquette and I know this isn't the customary part of the dinner hour to make presentations! Ahem! But I have a reason. I hate black clouds and I understand Marty here thinks the mine is going to some one else and isn't very happy at the thought! So I banish the clouds! In the words of our dearly beloved English professor:

"'Hence, loathed Melancholy
Of Cerberus and —'

Oh, dear, I can't remember the rest — but anyhow, let's all be happy!"

"I don't understand," Marty said, rising from his seat.

"Oh, we're not paying your rent — we're simply making it possible for you to continue doing that little thing yourself. You see Hen took it into his head that somebody'd try to take the mine away from you — seeing mushroom growing in it was a sure

thing — and so he talked the matter over with the professor and with your father and while you and Larry were away on that joy trip of yours in Connecticut, the lease was renewed, in your dad's name. Lucky thing it was, too — judging by later developments, isn't it? But Hen and your father decided to keep it as a little surprise for you and spring it to-night and — that's the whole story."

Marty's eyes sought the professor's across the table, then Mr. Blanchard's in the other direction. There was an understanding twinkle in both pairs.

"You knew," he said to the professor, "you knew this morning."

The professor nodded. "But we had agreed not to tell you until to-night. Of course if we'd had any idea that you were worrying about losing the mine we'd have told the facts at once. But you kept that worry all to yourself and even I never guessed until this afternoon."

"I don't care now! I always liked surprises and you people have certainly handed me a delightful one." Marty hesitated, his eyes shining. Then he turned to Hen. "You're a peach of a business man, Hen. I'll take my hat off to you any time."

At this Mammy Lize precipitated herself into the situation. With arms akimbo she faced the dinner guests.

"What fo' you-all sittin' 'roun' heah 'thout eatin'?" she demanded. "You-all stop talkin' and

fall to. I suah nough ain't gwine have all ma cawn fritters get soggy jes' so you can talk. Eat now and talk when you-all get done!"

"Pretty good advice, Mammy. It's a vegetable dinner, folks, in deference to the wishes of the Food Administration — a war-time banquet — but I hope you'll all enjoy it. Spac is the only one to get a bit of meat; he's to have a chop all to himself!"

And then they "fell to" and in a way that delighted the colored lady, who declared that when she had been "slavin' away a-cookin' vittles" she liked to have "'em et up."

They pronounced the mushrooms the tenderest and the juiciest they had ever tasted. And such quantities as there were of them!

"Really, you know," Wilda Bennett remarked frankly, "I've never had enough mushrooms before to know whether I liked them or not. Now I *know* I do."

"But how did you manage to cook so many things down here," Alice Fielding asked, "with so few conveniences?"

"Give Mammy Lize a gasoline stove and an open fire and she can do wonders," was Marty's reply.

"I didn't know there were so many kinds of vegetables," Bert Simmons confessed. "We must have had a dozen varieties — corn and tomatoes and onions and cabbages and squash and string beans and, and —"

"Hush!" Wilda commanded. "You sound too much like a green-goods grocer!"

"Humph! I never knew a green-goods grocer who had so many kinds as that. If I could have vegetables like these cooked as these are, I wouldn't care if I never saw a beefsteak again!"

It was indeed a most successful vegetarian party, "rounded out and topped off" as Mammy Lize said, with an enormous berry shortcake. When the last vestige of that had disappeared, Marty announced that dancing was next in order.

One of the boys produced a violin, another a banjo, and soon dancing couples were floating up and down the long, gayly lighted tunnels.

"Even if these floors are not as smooth as glass" — glancing down at the hard-packed earth —"we're having a cracking good time," Bert sang out as he and Wilda swung past Marty, who was standing at one end of the tunnel watching his guests.

"Yes, we feel like woodland sprites and elves," Wilda added.

"Or cave men," Bert concluded.

"Pretty slick ending to your little experiment, eh?" Hen Elliott asked, joining Marty.

"It sure is a jolly ending, thanks to you. If you hadn't renewed that lease it would have been quite different. Whatever gave you the idea to do that?"

"Old Lanier snooping around here. It was plain

what he was after. Your father and I figured it all out and beat him to it — that's all."

Just then Blanchard came up.

"Well, Kelly, how about it? Does my offer of the afternoon go?" he inquired.

"It sure does," Marty answered without hesitation, "provided my business adviser approves"; he turned to Hen. "Mr. Blanchard has suggested taking over the mine and growing mushrooms on a large scale, with jobs for both dad and me."

"You'd be foolish to let a chance like that slip, old man," Hen said.

"Perhaps there'd be something for you too, Elliott," Mr. Blanchard went on. "Would you like that? I wouldn't mind having a salesman with your qualifications."

"But I go back to school in September."

"That's all right; Kelly, here, is going back to school too; but you can make your spare time count —"

"All right. I'm in for anything like that. When do I begin?"

Blanchard laughed. "Not so fast. You're rushing me. But I'll put you down on the list of intended employees."

Marty slipped away to one end of the tunnel where he knew his father and mother were sitting watching the dancers. He told them the good news.

"And just think, dad, it means a job for you — with more money than you used to make at the factory and a little income for me, too. Things will be easier, and I can go back to school. Isn't it wonderful?"

"It is, son — wonderful!" Mrs. Kelly answered. "We're so proud of you!" His mother's hand rested lovingly on his arm.

Marty looked embarrassed at this praise — but happy.

"Oh, this next dance is Wilda's — and — mine," he said suddenly and was off.

A few moments later his father and mother saw him come into view with Wilda. Their eyes followed him.

"He's a good boy," Mrs. Kelly said softly.

"He's a regular boy," Mr. Kelly added.

"And so you're coming back to school, Marty," the father and mother heard Wilda say as the couple went by, and Marty's quick, eager rejoinder, "Yes." "I'm so glad," came Wilda's voice again, and then something about the junior play and the junior prom. The actual words were lost to the parents' ears in the babel of talk and the sound of the music, but their significance was not.

Mr. Kelly looked at Mrs. Kelly, a world of meaning in his glance.

"A regular boy," he repeated, nodding proudly.

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